

Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

# Understand Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei (Chapter)

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# Understand Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

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## population per sq km

MALAYSIA



SINGAPORE



BRUNEI



≈ 70 people

# Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei Today

## Malaysia's 2013 Election

At the time of research, Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak has until April 2013 to call the country's next general election – all indications are that he will leave it until the last minute to do so. Ever since the previous elections in 2008 – in which the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and its coalition partner, Barisan Nasional (BN), saw their parliamentary dominance slashed to less than the customary two-thirds majority – the ruling coalition has been looking nervously at the increasing popularity of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition People's Alliance, led by Anwar Ibrahim. PR already are in control of three of Malaysia's 13 state governments.

In July 2011 and April 2012 rallies by Bersih ([www.bersih.org](http://www.bersih.org)), a civil rights organisation seeking fairer elections, brought tens of thousands of people onto the streets of central Kuala Lumpur (KL). Both ended up being broken up by police with tear gas and water cannons. Such is the suspicion of the government that Anwar admitted to being surprised when sodomy charges against him were thrown out in January 2012 because of unreliable evidence; the trial had dragged on for two years by that point. Information Minister Rais Yatim said that the verdict showed that judges were free to rule as they saw fit. See (p559) for more details about Anwar's trial and political career.

## Winning Policies?

Malaysia saw strong economic growth in 2012, partly linked to the government's \$444 billion Economic Transformation Program (ETP), which aims to lift the country to high-income status by 2020. To tackle public concerns about rampant graft, Najib also set up the independent

The Malaysian national oil and gas company Petronas ([www.petronas.com.my](http://www.petronas.com.my)) is one of the most profitable in the world. It accounted for about a third of the Malaysian government's estimated RM183 billion revenue in 2011.

## Top Fiction

**The Garden of Evening Mists** (Tan Twan Eng) Horticultural intrigue in the Malaysian highlands.

**Little Ironies: Stories of Singapore** (Catherine Lim) A collection by the doyenne of Singaporean fiction.

**Urban Odysseys** (Janet Tay & Eric Forbes, eds) Short stories set in KL that capture the city's multifaceted, multicultural flavour.

## Top Websites

**[www.thenutgraph.com](http://www.thenutgraph.com)** Features on Malaysian politics and popular culture.

**[www.theedgemaalaysia.com](http://www.theedgemaalaysia.com)** Business news and more general features.

**[www.themalaysianinsider.com](http://www.themalaysianinsider.com)** The people shaping Malaysia.

## if Malaysia were 100 people



50 would be Malay  
24 would be Chinese  
11 would be Orang Asli  
7 would be Indian  
8 would be other

## if Singapore were 100 people



14 would be Malay  
76 would be Chinese  
8 would be Indian  
2 would be other

Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC), which in 2011 resulted in 900 individuals being arrested on corruption charges.

While the hope is that such policies will persuade voters to stick with the ruling coalition rather than take a chance with PR when the election comes around, other government actions have played into the oppositions hands. The government's decision to replace the draconian *Internal Security Act* (ISA) with the *Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012* has been criticised by many, including Human Rights Watch, who believe the new legislation doesn't go far enough to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of Malaysians.

## Uneven Society in Singapore

With a per capita GDP of S\$63,000 in 2011, Singaporeans enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living. However, modern Singapore is grappling with several social and lifestyle issues. Features in the newspapers and the talk at local coffee shops invariably revolve around the soaring cost of living and the growing gap between the haves and have nots: a study in 2009 by the United Nations Development Programme found that Singapore has the most uneven distribution of wealth in the developed world, after Hong Kong.

There are also worries about the impact of gambling now that the island has two casinos and the ethnic tension created by an ever-increasing foreign population versus a declining citizen base. Singapore's birthrate is among the lowest in the world (7.7 births per 1000 people). The government offers plenty of incentives convincing couples to procreate, ranging from baby bonuses to government-subsidised salsa classes and amusing viral video campaigns advising couples to 'do their civic duty' to help increase the city-state's birthrate. Even so,

*Majulah Singapura* (Onward Singapore), the Singaporean national anthem, was composed by Zubir Said in 1958. Its lyrics are in Bahasa Malaysia, even though English is now the national language.

## Playlist

**Ghostbird** (Zee Avi; [www.zeeavi.com](http://www.zeeavi.com)) Second album from the folksy pop diva who was once a KL art student.

**Yuna** (Yuna; [www.yunamusic.com](http://www.yunamusic.com)) First all-English album by another Malaysian beauty with

a soulful voice to match her sultry looks.

**Harapan** (Reshmonu; [www.reshmonu.com](http://www.reshmonu.com)) Dance master Reshmonu's latest album.

## Top Non-Fiction

**Singapore: A Biography** (Mark Ravinder Frost & Yu-Mei Balasingam-chow; 2010) A well-written and handsomely illustrated history of Singapore.

**Malaysia at Random** (Editions Didier Millet; 2010) Quirky compendium of facts and anecdotes.

A 2012 report by the UN Refugee Agency noted 100,000 migrant workers in Brunei, some of whom face debt bondage, nonpayment of wages, passport confiscation, abusive employers and confinement to the home – conditions widely recognised as indicators of human trafficking.

Singapore's population doubled from 1980 to 2010 because of the influx of foreign workers, who now make up 27% of the population. To diffuse tensions, the government has put the breaks on the intake of migrants.

The use of social media is increasing, and it is now a viable voice alongside mainstream media, which is often accused of being a government mouthpiece. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong participated in an online chat for the 2011 election. However, on his Facebook page in October 2012 Lee posted, 'Let us be mindful of what we say, online and in person', following community anger sparked when a Singaporean resident's racially abusive Facebook rant went viral.

## Brunei: An Islamic Monarchy

Brunei finds itself in an odd position these days. Its population is becoming more connected to the outside world via the internet, MASwings flights and the physical upgrading of Bandar Seri Begawan's (BSB) airport, but on the other hand the Sultanate's vice laws are being expanded, and the existing ones now come with harsher penalties. The big question continues to be: what will happen when the oil runs out? For the average Brunei citizen, who is practically guaranteed work and a comfortable lifestyle by the government, that question feels too much like rocking the boat.

Many economists believe Brunei has focused heavily on a few segments of its National Development Plan – namely increasing GDP and employment – and ignored the bits on economic diversification. Tourism potential is always discussed, but a lack of alcohol will be a serious issue to overcome. In the meantime the Sultan continues to steer his nation towards Islamic fundamentalism, adopting a national ideology known as Melayu Islam Beraja (Malay Islamic Monarchy; MIB).

**Malaysia Bagus!** (Sharon Cheah; 2012) Engaging travelogue with stories from all of Malaysia's states plus Singapore.

## Dos and Don'ts

- » Do cover your head, arms and legs when visiting a mosque.
- » Do use your right hand only if eating with your fingers.
- » Don't embrace or kiss in public.
- » Don't point with your forefinger: use the thumb of your right hand with fingers folded under.

## Greetings

- » A *salam* involves both parties briefly clasping each other's hand then bringing the same hand to touch their heart.
- » Malay women don't shake hands with men – smile and nod or bow slightly instead.



# History

As the countries we know today, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have been around since 1963, 1965 and 1984 respectively. The region's history, of course, stretches back much further, although pinning down exactly how far back is a moot point due to a lack of archaeological evidence and early written records.

Earliest evidence of human life in the region is a 40,000-year-old skull found in Sarawak's Niah Caves, a period when Borneo was still connected to the Southeast Asian mainland. Discovered in 1991, the complete 11,000-year-old skeleton, 'Perak Man', has genetic similarities to the Negrito who now live in the mountainous rainforests of northern Malaysia.

The Negrito were joined by Malaysia's first immigrants, the Senoi, from southern Thailand, and later by the Proto-Malay, ancestors of today's Malays, who came by sea from Indonesia between 1500BC and 500 BC. Early civilisation here was shaped by the ebb and flow of the convergent sea trade from China and India. For example, it's thought that the word Malay (or Melayu) is based on the ancient Tamil word *malia*, meaning 'hill'. Other Malay words like *bahasa* (language), *raja* (ruler) and *jaya* (success) are Sanskrit terms imported to the area by Indian visitors as early as the 2nd century.

Events from the rise of the Melaka Sultanate in the 16th century were well documented locally and by the nations which came to trade with, and later rule over, the peninsula and Borneo, including the Portuguese, the Dutch and, finally, the British. It is during these centuries that renowned colonial figures such as Sir Stamford Raffles and James Brookes made their mark on the region. Post WWII, as Britain shed its Empire, the three proto-countries carved out independent identities resulting in the distinct but historically entwined nations of today.

*A History of Malaya* by Barbara and Leonard Andaya brilliantly explores the evolution of 'Malayness' in Malaysia's history and the challenges of building a multiracial, post-independence nation.

## TIMELINE

**c 150AD**

European knowledge of the Malay peninsula is confirmed in Ptolemy's book *Geographia*. It's likely that Romans visited the region during trading expeditions to India and China.

**200**

Langkasuka, one of the first Hindu-Malay kingdoms, is established on the peninsula around the area now known as Kedah. It lasted in one form or another until the 15th century.

**600**

From their base in southern Sumatra, most likely around modern-day Palembang, the Buddhist Srivijaya Empire dominates Malaya, Singapore, Indonesia and Borneo for another six centuries.

## Early Trade & Empires

By the 2nd century Malaya was known as far away as Europe. Ptolemy, the Greek geographer, labelled it Aurea Chersonesus (Golden Chersonese); Indian traders, who came in search of precious metals, tin and aromatic jungle woods, referred to the land as Savarnadvipa (Land of Gold). The first formalised religions on the peninsula – Hinduism and Buddhism – arrived with those Indian traders, giving rise to the first recorded Hindu kingdom on the peninsula, Langkasuka (from the Sanskrit for 'resplendent land').

From the 7th century to the 13th century, the area fell under the sway of the Srivijaya Empire, based in southern Sumatra. This Buddhist empire controlled the entire Malacca Straits, Java and southern Borneo and became fabulously rich through trade with India and China. Under the protection of the Srivijayans, a significant Malay trading state grew up in the Bujang Valley area in the far northwest of the Thai–Malay peninsula. The growing power of the southern Thai kingdom of Ligor and the Hindu Majapahit Empire of Java finally led to the demise of the Srivijayans in the 14th century.

## The Melaka Empire

The history of the Malay state begins in earnest in the late 14th century when Parameswara, a renegade Hindu prince/pirate from a little kingdom in southern Sumatra, washed up around 1401 in the tiny fishing village that would become Melaka. As a seafarer, Parameswara recognised a good port when he saw it and he immediately lobbied the Ming emperor of China for protection from the Thais in exchange for generous trade deals. Thus the Chinese came to Malaysia.

Equidistant between India and China, Melaka became a major stop for freighters from India loaded with pepper and cloth, and junks from

### THE ADOPTION OF ISLAM

Peninsular Malaysia was Buddhist and Hindu for a thousand years before the local rulers adopted Islam. The religion is believed to have spread through contact with Indian Muslim traders; in 1136 the Kedah Annals record that Hindu ruler Phra Ong Mahawangsa converted to Islam and founded the sultanate of Kedah, the oldest on Peninsular Malaysia.

The first sultan of Brunei, Muhammad Shah, converted to Islam in 1363 upon his marriage to a princess from Johor-Temasik. Maharaja Mohammed Shah of Melaka, who reigned between 1424 and 1444, also converted. The maharaja's son, Mudzaffar Shah, later took the title of sultan and made Islam the state religion. With its global trade links, Melaka became a regional hub for the dissemination of Islam and the Malay language.

#### 1402

Hindu prince and pirate Parameswara (1344–1414) founds the great trading port and sultanate of Melaka; seven years later he marries a Muslim princess and adopts the Persian title Iskandar Shah.

#### 1446

A naval force from Siam (Thailand) attacks Melaka. Warded off, the Siamese return in 1456 but are again rebuffed. Such attacks encourage Melaka's rulers to develop closer relations with China.

#### 1509

Portuguese traders sail into Melaka. Although at first greeted warmly, acting on the advice of his Indian Muslim councillors, the Melakan sultan later attacks the Portuguese ships, taking 19 prisoners.

#### 1511

Following the Portuguese conquest of Melaka, the sultan and his court flee, establishing two new sultanates on the peninsula: Perak to the north and Johor to the south.



China loaded with porcelain and silks, which were traded for local metal and spices. Business boomed as regional ships and *perahu* (Malay-style sampans) arrived to take advantage of trading opportunities. The Melakan sultans soon ruled over the greatest empire in Malaysia's history.

## The Portuguese Era

By the 15th century, Europe had developed an insatiable appetite for spices, which were conveyed there via a convoluted trade route through India and Arabia. The Portuguese decided to cut out the middle man and go directly to the source: Melaka. Reaching the Malay coast in 1509, the Portuguese were greeted warmly by the local sultan, but relations soon soured. The invaders laid siege to Melaka in 1511, capturing the city and driving the sultan and his forces back to Johor.

The Portuguese secured Melaka by building the robust Porta de Santiago (A'Famosa fortress) and their domination lasted 130 years, though the entire period was marked by skirmishes with local sultans. Compared with Indian Muslim traders, the Portuguese contributed little to Malay culture; attempts to introduce Christianity and the Portuguese language were never a big success, though a dialect of Portuguese, *Kris-tang*, is still spoken in Melaka.

## The Dutch Period

Vying with the Portuguese for control of the spice trade, the Dutch formed an allegiance with the sultans of Johor to oust the Portuguese from Melaka. A joint force of Dutch and Johor soldiers and sailors besieged Melaka in 1641 and wrested the city from the Portuguese. In return for its cooperation, Johor was made exempt from most of the tariffs and trade restrictions imposed on other vassal states. Despite maintaining control of Melaka for about 150 years, the Dutch never really realised the full potential of the city. High taxes forced merchants to seek out other ports and the Dutch focused their main attention on Batavia (now Jakarta) as their regional headquarters.

## East India Company

British interest in the region began with the need for a halfway base for East India Company (EIC) ships plying the India–China maritime route. The first base was established on the island of Penang in 1786.

Meanwhile, events in Europe were conspiring to consolidate British interests on the Malay peninsula. When Napoleon overran the Netherlands in 1795, the British, fearing French influence in the region, took over Dutch Java and Melaka. When Napoleon was defeated in 1818, the

Sabri Zain's colourful website *Sejarah Melayu: A History of the Malay Peninsula* ([www.sabrizain.org/malaya](http://www.sabrizain.org/malaya)) contains a wealth of historical info including a virtual library of nearly 500 books and academic papers.

*Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), a literary work covering the establishment of the Melaka sultanate and 600 years of Malay history, is believed to have been compiled by Tun Sri Lanang, the *bendahara* (chief minister) of the Johor Royal Court in the early 17th century.

### 1629

The Portuguese in Melaka and the sultanate of Johor unite to successfully defend themselves against the navy of Iskandar Muda, the sultan of Aceh in Sumatra, who had already conquered Kedah.

### 1641

After a siege lasting several months the Dutch, with the help of the Johor sultanate, wrest Melaka from the Portuguese. Melaka starts to decline as a major trading port.

### 1786

Francis Light cuts a deal with the sultan of Kedah to establish a settlement on the largely uninhabited island of Penang. Under a free-trade policy the island's new economy thrives.



STUART DEE/CORBIS IMAGES ©

» Francis Light, Penang



## THE NAVEL OF THE MALAY COUNTRIES

'It is impossible to conceive a place combining more advantages...it is the Navel of the Malay countries', wrote a delighted Raffles soon after landing in Singapore in 1819. The statement proves his foresight because at the time the island was an inhospitable swamp surrounded by dense jungle, with a population of 150 fishermen and a small number of Chinese farmers. Raffles returned to his post in Bencoolen, Sumatra, but left instructions on Singapore's development as a free port with the new British Resident, Colonel William Farquhar.

In 1822 Raffles returned to Singapore and governed it for one more year. He initiated a town plan that included levelling a hill to form a new commercial district (now Raffles Place) and erecting government buildings around Forbidden Hill (now Fort Canning Hill). Wide streets of shophouses with covered walkways, shipyards, churches and a botanical garden were all built to achieve his vision of a Singapore that would one day be 'a place of considerable magnitude and importance'.

Raffles' blueprint also embraced the colonial practice of administering the population according to neat racial categories, with the Europeans, Indians, Chinese and Malays living and working in their own distinct quarters.

F Spencer Chapman's *The Jungle* follows a British guerrilla force based in the Malaysian jungles during the Japanese occupation of Malaya and Singapore.

British handed the Dutch colonies back – but not before leaving the fortress of A'Famosa beyond use.

The British lieutenant-governor of Java, Stamford Raffles – yes, *that* Stamford Raffles – soon persuaded the EIC that a settlement south of the Malay peninsula was crucial to the India–China maritime route. In 1819, he landed in Singapore and negotiated a trade deal with Johor that saw the island ceded to Britain in perpetuity, in exchange for a significant cash tribute.

In 1824, Britain and the Netherlands signed the Anglo-Dutch Treaty, dividing the region into two distinct spheres of influence. The Dutch controlled what is now Indonesia, and the British controlled Penang, Melaka, Dinding and Singapore, which were soon combined to create the 'Straits Settlements'.

## Borneo Developments

Britain did not include Borneo in the Anglo-Dutch treaty, preferring that the EIC concentrate its efforts on consolidating their power on the peninsula rather than furthering their geographical scope. Into the breach jumped opportunistic British adventurer James Brooke. In 1841, having helped the local viceroy quell a rebellion, Brooke was installed as raja of Sarawak, with the fishing village of Kuching as his capital.

### 1790

The sultan of Kedah's attempt to retake Penang from the British fails. He is forced to cede the island to the British East India Company for 6000 Spanish dollars per annum.

### 1819

By backing the elder brother in a succession dispute in Johor, Stamford Raffles gains sole rights to build a trading base on the island of Singapore.

### 1823

The Johor sultan fully cedes Singapore to Britain. A year later the Dutch and British carve up the region into what eventually becomes Malaya and Indonesia.

### 1826

Having swapped Bencoolen on Sumatra for the Dutch-controlled Melaka, the British East India Company combines this with Penang and Singapore to create the Straits Settlements.

Through brutal naval force and skilful negotiation, Brooke extracted further territory from the Brunei sultan and eventually brought peace to a land where piracy, headhunting and violent tribal rivalry had been the norm. The 'White Raja' dynasty of the Brookes was to rule Sarawak until 1941 and the arrival of the Japanese.

Unlike the British, the White Rajas included tribal leaders in their ruling council. They also discouraged large European companies from destroying native jungle to plant massive rubber plantations. They encouraged Chinese migration, which meant that the Chinese, without European competition, came to dominate the economy.

Meanwhile, the once-mighty empire of Brunei, which had held sway over all the islands of Borneo and much of present-day Philippines, continued to shrink. In 1865 the American consul to Brunei persuaded the ailing sultan to grant him what is now Sabah in return for an annual payment. The rights eventually passed to an Englishman, Alfred Dent. In 1881, with the support of the British government, Dent formed the British North Borneo Company to administer the new settlement. To prevent a scramble for Brunei's remains, in 1888 the British government acceded to a request by the sultan to declare his territory a British protectorate.

Noel Barber's *The War of the Running Dogs* is a classic account of the 12-year Malayan Emergency. The title refers to what the communist fighters called the opposition who were loyal to the British.

## British Malaya

In Peninsular Malaya, Britain's policy of 'trade, not territory' was challenged when trade was disrupted by civil wars within the Malay sultanates of Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Pahang and Perak. In 1874 the British started to take political control by appointing the first colonial governor of Perak. In 1896 Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang were united under the banner of the Federated Malay States, each governed by a British Resident.

### CREATING A MULTICULTURAL NATION

British rule radically altered the ethnic composition of Malaya. Chinese and Indian migrant workers were brought into the country as they shared a similar economic agenda and had less nationalist grievances against the colonial administration than the native Malays. The Chinese were encouraged to work the mines and the Indians to tap the rubber trees and build the railways. The Ceylonese were clerks in the civil service, and the Sikhs manned the police force.

Even though the 'better-bred' Malays were encouraged to join a separate arm of the civil service, there was growing resentment among the vast majority of Malays that they were being marginalised in their own country. A 1931 census revealed that the Chinese numbered 1.7 million and the Malays 1.6 million. Malaya's economy was revolutionised, but the impact of this liberal immigration policy continues to reverberate today.

#### 1839

British buccaneer James Brooke lands in Sarawak and helps quell a local rebellion. In gratitude, the Brunei sultanate installs him as the first White Raja of Sarawak two years later.

#### 1874

The British start to take control of Peninsular Malaysia after Pankor Treaty with the sultan of Perak; Sir James Birch is installed as the Perak's first British Resident.

#### 1888

Having lost much territory to the British Empire, Brunei's sultan signs a treaty to make his country a British protectorate. A British Resident is installed in 1906.

#### 1896

Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang join as Federated Malay States; the sultans concede political power to British Residents but keep control of matters relating to Malay traditions and Islam.

Covering events up to 2001, the second edition of Graham Saunderson's *History of Brunei* is the only full-length study of how this tiny country came to be formed.

Amir Muhammad's *Malaysian Politicians Say the Darndest Things Vols 1 & 2* (see [www.kinibooks.com](http://www.kinibooks.com)) gathers together jaw-dropping statements uttered by the local polities over the last three decades – including 'If you come across a snake and a man from a certain ethnic community, you should hit the man first'.

Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah were then purchased from the Thais, in exchange for the construction of the southern Thai railway, much to the dismay of local sultans. The 'Unfederated Malay States' eventually accepted British 'advisers', though the sultan of Terengganu held out till 1919 – to this day, the states of the northeast peninsula form the heartland of the fundamentalist Malay Muslim nationalist movement.

By the eve of WWII Malays from all states were pushing for independence.

## WWII Period

A few hours before the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japanese forces landed on the northeast coast of Malaya. Within a few months they had taken over the entire peninsula and Singapore. The poorly defended Borneo states fell even more rapidly.

Singapore's new governor, General Yamashita, slung the Europeans into the infamous Changi Prison, and Chinese communists and intellectuals, who had vociferously opposed the Japanese invasion of China, were targeted for Japanese brutality. Thousands were executed in a single week. In Borneo, early resistance by the Chinese was also brutally put down.

The Japanese achieved very little in Malaya. The British had destroyed most of the tin-mining equipment before their retreat, and the rubber plantations were neglected. The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA), comprising remnants of the British army and Chinese from the fledgling Malayan Communist Party, waged a weak jungle-based guerrilla struggle throughout the war.

The Japanese surrendered to the British in Singapore in 1945. Despite the eventual Allied victory, Britain had been humiliated by the easy loss of Malaya and Singapore to the Japanese, and it was clear that their days of controlling the region were now numbered.

## Federation of Malaya

In 1946 the British persuaded the sultans to agree to the Malayan Union, which amalgamated all the peninsular Malayan states into a central authority and offered citizenship to all residents regardless of race. In the process, the sultans were reduced to the level of paid advisers, the system of special privileges for Malays was abandoned and ultimate sovereignty passed to the king of England.

The normally acquiescent Malay population were less enthusiastic about the venture than the sultans. Rowdy protest meetings were held throughout the country, and the first Malay political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), was formed, leading to the dissolution of the Malayan Union and, in 1948, the creation of the Federation

### 1909

Britain does a deal with Thailand to gain control of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah. Johor succumbs to a British Resident in 1914, completing the set of 'Unfederated Malay States'.

### 1941

The Japanese land on Malaya's northeast coast. Within a month they've taken Kuala Lumpur, and a month later they are at Singapore's doorstep.

### 1942

The British suffer a humiliating defeat in February as Singapore capitulates to the Japanese. The occupiers rename it Syonan (Light of the South).

### 1946

The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) is formed on 1 March, signalling the rise of Malay nationalism and a desire for political independence from Britain.

## THE EMERGENCY

While the creation of the Federation of Malaya appeased Malays, the Chinese felt betrayed, particularly given their massive contribution to the war effort. Many joined the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which promised an equitable and just society. In 1948 the MCP took to the jungles and embarked on a 12-year guerrilla war against the British. Even though the insurrection was on par with the Malay civil wars of the 19th century, it was classified as an 'Emergency' for insurance purposes.

The effects of the Emergency were felt most strongly in the countryside, where villages and plantation owners were repeatedly targeted by rebels. In 1951 the British high commissioner was assassinated on the road to Fraser's Hill. His successor, General Sir Gerald Templer, set out to 'win the hearts and minds of the people'. Almost 500,000 rural Chinese were forcibly resettled into protected *kampung baru* (new villages), restrictions were lifted on guerrilla-free areas, and the jungle-dwelling Orang Asli were bought into the fight to help the police track down the insurgents.

In 1960 the Emergency was declared over, although sporadic fighting continued and the formal surrender was signed only in 1989.

of Malaya, which reinstated the sovereignty of the sultans and the special privileges of the Malays.

## Merdeka & Malaysia

Malaysia's march to independence from British rule was led by UMNO, which formed a strategic alliance with the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA; [www.mca.org.my](http://www.mca.org.my)) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC; [www.mic.org.my](http://www.mic.org.my)). The new Alliance Party led by Tunku Abdul Rahman won a landslide victory in the 1955 election and, on 31 August 1957, Merdeka (Independence) was declared. Sarawak, Sabah (then North Borneo) and Brunei remained under British rule.

In 1961 Tunku Abdul Rahman proposed a merger of Singapore, Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei, which the British agreed to the following year. At the eleventh hour Brunei pulled out of the deal, as Sultan Sri Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin III (and, one suspects, Shell Oil) didn't want to see the revenue from its vast oil reserves channelled to the peninsula.

When modern Malaysia was born in July 1963 it immediately faced a diplomatic crisis. The Philippines broke off relations, claiming that Sabah was part of its territory (a claim upheld to this day), while Indonesia laid claim to the whole of Borneo, invading parts of Sabah and Sarawak before finally giving up its claim in 1966.

The marriage between Singapore and Malaya was also doomed from the start. Ethnic Chinese outnumbered Malays in both Malaysia and

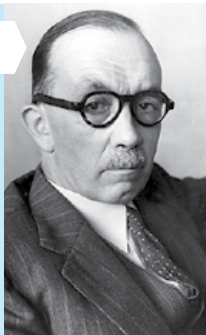
*Revolusi 48*  
(<http://revolusi48.blogspot.co.uk>, in Bahasa Malaysia), the sequel to Fahmi Reza's doco *10 Tahun Sebelum Merdeka* (10 Years Before Merdeka), chronicles the largely forgotten armed revolution for national liberation launched against British colonial rule in Malaya.

### 1948

The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) take to the jungles and begins fighting a guerrilla war against the British, known as the 'Emergency', that will last 12 years.

### 1951

Sir Henry Gurney, British high commissioner to Malaya, is assassinated by MCP rebels on the road to Fraser's Hill, a terrorist act that alienates many of the party's moderate Chinese members.



» Sir Henry Gurney

### 1953

The Parti Perikatan (Alliance Party) is formed, an alliance between UNMO, the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and Malayan Indian Congress (MIC). Two years later the party wins Malaya's first national elections.

**1957–2007**  
*Chronicle of Malaysia*, edited by Philip Mathews, is a beautifully designed book showcasing 50 years of the country's history in news stories and pictures.

Dr Mahathir Mohamad's first book, *The Malay Dilemma*, in which he postulated that Malay backwardness was due to hereditary and cultural factors, was banned in 1970.

Singapore and the new ruler of the island-state, Lee Kuan Yew, refused to extend constitutional privileges to the Malays in Singapore. Riots broke out in Singapore in 1964; in August 1965 Tunku Abdul Rahman was forced to boot Singapore out of the federation.

## Ethnic Tensions

Impoverished Malays became increasingly resentful of the economic success of Chinese Malaysians, while the Chinese grew resentful of the political privileges granted to Malays. Things reached breaking point when the Malay-dominated government attempted to suppress all languages except Malay and introduced a national policy of education that ignored Chinese and Indian history, language and culture.

In the 1969 general elections, the Alliance Party lost its two-thirds majority in parliament and a celebration march by the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) and Gerakan (The People's Movement) in KL led to a full-scale riot, which Malay gangs used as a pretext to loot Chinese businesses, killing hundreds of Chinese in the process.

Stunned by the savageness of the riots, the government decided that if there was ever going to be harmony between the races then the Malay community needed to achieve economic parity. To this end the New Economic Policy (NEP), a socioeconomic affirmative action plan, was introduced. The Alliance Party also invited opposition parties to join them and work from within, and the expanded coalition was renamed the Barisan Nasional (BN; National Front).

## The Era of Mahathir

In 1981 former UMNO member Mahathir Mohamad became prime minister. Malaysia's economy went into overdrive, growing from one based on commodities such as rubber to one firmly rooted in industry and manufacturing. Government monopolies were privatised, and heavy industries like steel manufacturing (a failure) and the Malaysian car (successful but heavily protected) were encouraged. Multinationals were successfully wooed to set up in Malaysia, and manufactured exports began to dominate the trade figures.

One notable criticism of Mahathir's premiership was that the main media outlets became little more than government mouthpieces. The sultans lost their right to give final assent on legislation, and the once proudly independent judiciary appeared to become subservient to government wishes, the most notorious case being that of Anwar Ibrahim. Mahathir also permitted widespread use of the Internal Security Act (ISA) to silence opposition leaders and social activists, most famously in 1987's Operation Lalang, when 106 people were arrested and the publishing licences of several newspapers were revoked.

### 1957

On 31 August Merdeka (independence) is declared in Malaya; Tunku Abdul Rahman becomes first prime minister and the nine sultans agree to take turns as the nation's king.

### 1963

In July the British Borneo territories of Sabah and Sarawak are combined with Singapore and Malaya to form Malaysia – a move that sparks confrontations with Indonesia and the Philippines.

### 1965

In August, following Singapore's refusal to extend constitutional privileges to the Malays on the island and subsequent riots, Singapore is booted out of Malaysia. Lee Kuan Yew becomes Singapore's first prime minister.

### 1967

Sultan Sri Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin III voluntarily abdicates in favour of his eldest son and the current ruler, the 29th in the unbroken royal Brunei line, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah.

## BUMIPUTRA PRIVILEGES

When introduced in 1971, the aim of the New Economic Policy (NEP) was that 30% of Malaysia's corporate wealth be in the hands of indigenous Malays, or *bumiputra* (princes of the land), within 20 years. A massive campaign of positive discrimination began which handed majority control over the army, police, civil service and government to Malays. The rules extended to education, scholarships, share deals, corporate management and even the right to import a car.

By 1990 *bumiputra* corporate wealth had risen to 19%, but was still 11% short of the original target. Poverty in general fell dramatically, a new Malay middle class emerged and nationalist violence by Malay extremists receded. However, cronyism and discrimination against Indians and Chinese increased, while Malays still accounted for three in four of the poorest people in the country.

Affirmative action in favour of *bumiputra* continues today but there is a growing recognition that it is hampering rather than helping Malaysia. Former law minister Zaid Ibrahim was reported in the *New York Times* as saying that Malaysia had 'sacrificed democracy for the supremacy of one race', because of the economic privileges given to *bumiputra*. In September 2010 Prime Minister Najib advocated a fundamental reform of the pro-Malay policies, but fell short of calling for outright scrapping of the system.

In the opposite corner are those, like former prime minister Mahathir, who believe that *bumiputra* would suffer the most if the administration were to implement a 100 per cent meritocracy-based system. A July 2010 poll by the independent Merdeka Centre shows that Malays in general are split on the matter: 45% believing the policies only benefit the rich and well-connected, 48% thinking they are good for the general public.

## Economic & Political Crisis

In 1997, after a decade of near constant 10% growth, Malaysia was hit by the regional currency crisis. Mahathir blamed it all on unscrupulous Western speculators deliberately undermining the economies of the developing world for their personal gain. He pegged the Malaysian ringgit to the US dollar, bailed out what were seen as crony companies, forced banks to merge and made it difficult for foreign investors to remove their money from Malaysia's stock exchange. Malaysia's subsequent recovery from the economic crisis, which was more rapid than that of many other Southeast Asian nations, further bolstered Mahathir's prestige.

Anwar Ibrahim, Mahathir's deputy prime minister and heir apparent, was at odds with Mahathir over how to deal with the economic crisis. Their falling out was so severe that in September 1998 Anwar was sacked and soon after charged with corruption and sodomy. Many Malaysians, feeling that Anwar had been falsely arrested, took to the streets chanting Anwar's call for '*reformasi*'. The demonstrations were harshly quelled

Amir Muhammad's 2009 documentary *Malaysian Gods* commemorates the decade after the Reformasi movement began with the sacking of Anwar Ibrahim as deputy PM in 1998.

### 1969

Following the general election, on 13 March race riots erupt in KL, killing 198. In response the government devises the New Economic Policy of positive discrimination for Malays.

### 1974

Following the formation of the Barisan Nasional (BN) in 1973, this new coalition led by Tun Abdul Razak wins the Malaysian general election by a landslide.

### 1981

Dr Mahathir Mohamad becomes prime minister of Malaysia and introduces policies of 'Buy British Last' and 'Look East' to encourage the country to emulate Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

### 1984

A somewhat reluctant Sultan Hassanah Bolkiah leads Brunei to complete independence from Britain. The country subsequently veers towards Islamic fundamentalism, introducing full Islamic law in 1991.

Brunei's ties with its former colonial master remain strong: UK judges sit in the High Court and Court of Appeal and a British Army Gurkha battalion is permanently stationed in Seria.

and, in trials that were widely criticised as unfair, Anwar was sentenced to a total of 15 years' imprisonment. The international community rallied around Anwar, with Amnesty International proclaiming him a prisoner of conscience.

In the following year's general elections BN suffered huge losses, particularly in the rural Malay areas. The big winners were the fundamentalist Islamic party, PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia), which had vociferously supported Anwar, and a new political party, Keadilan (People's Justice Party), headed by Anwar's wife Wan Azizah.

## BN on the Ropes

Prime Minister Mahathir's successor, Abdullah Badawi, was sworn into office in 2003 and went on to lead BN to a landslide victory in the following year's election. In stark contrast to his feisty predecessor, the pious Abdullah immediately impressed voters by taking a nonconfrontational, consensus-seeking approach. He set up a royal commission to investigate corruption in the police force (its recommendations have yet to be implemented) and called time on several of the massively expensive mega projects that had been the hallmark of the Mahathir era, including a new bridge across the Straits of Johor to Singapore.

Released from jail in 2004, Anwar returned to national politics in August 2008 on winning the bi-election for the seat vacated by his wife. However, sodomy charges were again laid against the politician in June and he was arrested in July.

In the March 2008 election, UMNO and its coalition partners in Barisan Nasional (BN) saw their parliamentary dominance slashed to less than the customary two-thirds majority. Pakatan Rakyat (PR), the opposition People's Alliance, led by Anwar Ibrahim, not only bagged 82 of parliament's 222 seats but also took control of four out of Malaysia's 13 states, including the key economic bases of Selangor and Penang. PR subsequently lost Perak following a complex powerplay between various defecting MPs.

Abdullah Badawi resigned in favour of his urbane deputy, Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak (typically referred to as Najib Razak), in April 2008. Son of Abdul Razak, Malaysia's second prime minister after independence and nephew of Razak's successor Hussein Onn, Najib has been groomed for this role ever since he first entered national politics at the age of 23 in 1976. However, the change of guard may be too late to resurrect the fortunes of UMNO, a party seen as corrupt and out of touch with the people, according to a survey by the Merdeka Centre ([www.merdeka.org](http://www.merdeka.org)).

### 1998

Anwar Ibrahim is sacked, arrested, sent for trial and jailed following disagreements with Dr Mahathir over how to deal with the Asian currency crisis and tackle government corruption.

### 2003

Having announced his resignation the previous year, Dr Mahathir steps down as prime minister in favour of Abdullah Badawi. He remains very outspoken on national politics.

### 2007

As the country celebrates 50 years since independence it is also shaken by two anti-government rallies in November in which tens of thousands take to the streets of KL to protest.

### 2008

In the March election BN retains power but suffers heavy defeats to the revitalised opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat (PR); in August Anwar Ibrahim becomes PR leader following his re-election to parliament.



## Improving International Relations

Ever since Malaysia booted Singapore out of the federation in 1965, leaving Lee Kuan Yew sobbing on camera, the two countries have acted like squabbling siblings. Singapore, the over-achieving youngster with few natural resources beyond its hard working population, has managed to claw its way from obscurity to world admiration for its rapid and successful industrialisation. Across the causeway big brother Malaysia has achieved a no less impressive economic transformation, albeit one built on prodigious resources, in particular the profits from oil and gas.

Relations between the two reached the heights of touchiness in the 1990s. Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir and Singapore's 'Minister Mentor' Lee Kuan Yew parried insults back and forth across the Causeway, the former accusing Singaporeans of being the sort of people who 'urinate in lifts' and the latter retorting that the Malaysian town of Johor Bahru was 'notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings'.

Recently however, relations seem to be improving. Persistent squabbles over water (under a 1962 accord, Malaysia supplies Singapore with 250 million gallons of raw water daily) are becoming moot as Singapore develops alternative sources of supply. The 2011 land swap deal that ended a long running dispute over the KTM railway line in Singapore was also heralded as a historic breakthrough in attitudes between the two countries.

Relations between Malaysia and Brunei also became a lot more cordial in 2009, when the two signed a deal that ended a 20-year territorial dispute between the neighbouring countries over the land border around Limbang and ownership of offshore gas and oil exploration sites. Malaysian company Petronas is now working with Brunei to develop the the sites.

*Lee's Law:  
How Singapore  
Crushes Dissent,*  
by Chris Lydgate,  
is a disturbing  
and sad account  
of the rise and  
systematic  
destruction of  
Singapore's  
most successful  
opposition politi-  
cian lawyer, JB  
Jeyaretnam.

### 2009

In April, Najib Tun Razak succeeds Abdullah Badawi as prime minister; the 1Malaysia policy is introduced to build respect and trust between the country's different races.



» Mural of previous prime ministers, Kuala Lumpur (p46)

### 2011

Elections in Sarawak return a BN state government but with a reduced majority; tens of thousands rally in KL in support of fairer elections.



# People, Culture & Politics

Travelling in this region you will invariably meet friendly, welcoming Malaysians, Singaporeans and Bruneians who hold a strong sense of shared experience and national identity. However, none of these multicultural nations is the perfect melting pot – underlying religious and ethnic tensions are a fact of life, particularly in Malaysia.

There are distinct cultural differences between the region's three main ethnic communities – Malays, Chinese and Indians. There's also the Peranakan (Straits Chinese) and other mixed race communities to take into account, alongside older aboriginal nations – the Orang Asli of Peninsula Malaysia and Borneo's indigenous community – comprising scores of different tribal groups and speaking around well over 100 languages and dialects.

All three countries have dabbled, to different degrees, with social and economic policies to shape the lives of their citizens. In Malaysia, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was designed to promote the position of Malays – it's only been partially successful. In Singapore the government encouraged birth control in the 1970s and 1980s (to stem a booming population), but that plan worked too well and it now provides much encouragement, financial and otherwise (in particular, to educated Chinese Singaporeans) to have more children. In Brunei the Sultan has steered his nation towards Islamic fundamentalism, adopting a national ideology known as *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB).

## The Region's Peoples

### The Malays

All Malays, Muslims by birth, are supposed to follow Islam, but many also adhere to older spiritual beliefs and *adat*. With its roots in the Hindu period, *adat* places great emphasis on collective responsibility and maintaining harmony within the community – almost certainly a factor in the general goodwill between the different ethnic groups in Malaysia.

The enduring appeal of the communal *kampung* (village) spirit shouldn't be underestimated – many an urban Malay hankers after it, despite the affluent Western-style living conditions they enjoy at home. In principle, villagers are of equal status, though a headman is appointed on the basis of his wealth, greater experience or spiritual knowledge. Traditionally the founder of the village was appointed village leader (*penghulu* or *ketua kampung*) and often members of the same family would also become leaders. A *penghulu* is usually a haji, one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Muslim religious leader, the imam, holds a position of great importance in the community as the keeper of Islamic knowledge and the leader of prayer; but even educated urban Malaysians periodically turn

Status-conscious Malaysians love their honourable titles which include, in order of importance, Tun, Tan Sri, Datuk and Dato.

The Malay surname is the child's father's first name. This is why Malaysians will use your given name after the Mr or Miss; to use your surname would be to address your father.

to *pawang* (shamans who possess a supernatural knowledge of harvests and nature) or *bomoh* (spiritual healers with knowledge of curative plants and the ability to harness the power of the spirit world), for advice before making any life-changing decisions.

## The Chinese

Religious customs govern much of the Chinese community's home life, from the moment of birth, which is carefully recorded for astrological consultations later in life, to funerals which also have many rites and rituals. The Chinese who started arriving in the region in early 15th century came mostly from the southern Chinese province of Fujian and eventually formed one half of the group known as Peranakans. They developed their own distinct hybrid culture whereas later settlers, from Guangdong and Hainan provinces stuck more closely to the culture of their homelands, including keeping their dialects.

If there's one cultural aspect that all Chinese in the region agree on it's the importance of education. It has been a very sensitive subject amongst the Malaysian Chinese community since the attempt in the 1960s to phase out secondary schools where Chinese was the medium of teaching, and the introduction of government policies that favour Malays in the early 1970s. The constraining of educational opportunities within Malaysia for the ethnic Chinese has resulted in many families working doubly hard to afford the tuition fees needed to send their offspring to private schools within the country and to overseas institutions.

*Kiasu*, a Hokkien word describing Singaporeans, literally means 'afraid to lose', but embraces a range of selfish and pushy behaviour in which the individual must not lose out at all cost.

## The Indians

Like the Chinese settler, Indians in the region hail from many parts of the subcontinent and have different cultures depending on their religions - mainly Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity. Most are Tamils, originally coming from the area now known as Tamil Nadu in southern India where Hindu traditions are strong. Later Muslim Indians from northern India followed along with Sikhs. These religious affiliations dictate many of the home life customs and practices of Malaysian Indians, although one celebration that all Hindus and much of the rest of the region takes part in is Deepavali.

A small, English-educated Indian elite has always played a prominent role in Malaysian and Singaporean society, and a significant merchant class exists. However, a large percentage of Indians - imported as indentured labourers by the British - remain a poor working class in both countries.

## The Orang Asli

The indigenous people of Malaysia - known collectively as Orang Asli - played an important role in early trade, teaching the colonialists about forest products and guiding prospectors to outcrops of tin and precious metals. They also acted as scouts and guides for anti-insurgent forces during the communist Emergency in the 1950s.

Despite this, the Orang Asli remain marginalised in Malaysia. According to the most recent data published by the Department of Orang Asli Affairs (JHEOA; [www.jheoa.gov.my](http://www.jheoa.gov.my)), in December 2004 Peninsular Malaysia had just under 150,000 Orang Asli (Original People); 80% live below the poverty line, compared with an 8.5% national average. The tribes are generally classified into three groups: the Negrito; the Senoi; and the Proto-Malays, who are subdivided into 18 tribes, the smallest being the Orang Kanak with just 87 members. There are dozens of different tribal languages and most Orang Asli follow animist beliefs, though there are vigorous attempts to convert them to Islam.

## THE PERANAKANS

Peranakan means 'half-caste' in Malay, which is exactly what the Peranakans are: descendants of Chinese immigrants who from the 16th century onwards settled principally in Singapore, Melaka and Penang and married Malay women.

The culture and language of the Peranakans is a fascinating melange of Chinese and Malay traditions. The Peranakans took the name and religion of their Chinese fathers, but the customs, language and dress of their Malay mothers. They also used the terms Straits-born or Straits Chinese to distinguish themselves from later arrivals from China.

Another name you may hear for these people is Baba-Nonyas, after the Peranakan words for men (*baba*) and women (*nonya*). The Peranakans were often wealthy traders who could afford to indulge their passion for sumptuous furnishings, jewellery and brocades. Their terrace houses were brightly painted, with patterned tiles embedded in the walls for extra decoration. When it came to the interior, Peranakan tastes favoured heavily carved and inlaid furniture.

Peranakan dress was similarly ornate. Women wore fabulously embroidered *kasot manek* (beaded slippers) and *kebaya* (blouses worn over a sarong), tied with beautiful *kerasong* (brooches), usually of fine filigree gold or silver. Men – who assumed Western dress in the 19th century, reflecting their wealth and contacts with the British – saved their finery for important occasions such as the wedding ceremony, a highly stylised and intricate ritual dictated by *adat* (Malay customary law).

The Peranakan patois is a Malay dialect but one containing many Hokkien words – so much so that it is largely unintelligible to a Malay speaker. The Peranakans also included words and expressions of English and French, and occasionally practised a form of backward Malay by reversing the syllables.

Although the JHEOA was originally set up to represent Orang Asli concerns to the government (ie land rights), the department has evolved into a conduit for government decisions. Asli land rights are not recognised, and when logging, agricultural or infrastructure projects require their land, their claims are generally regarded as illegal.

In 2010 the government put forward plans to corporatise JHEOA so it could take charge of Orang Asli lands (currently the Orang Asli manage their own small holdings). The Centre for Orang Asli Concerns ([www.coac.org.my](http://www.coac.org.my)) has criticised the plan saying it will further impoverish an already poor group of people.

## Dayaks & the People of Borneo

Not all of Borneo's indigenous tribes refer to themselves as Dayaks, but the term usefully groups together peoples who have a great deal in common – and not just from an outsider's point of view.

### SARAWAK

Dayak culture and lifestyles are probably easiest to observe and experience in Sarawak, where Dayaks make up about 48% of the population.

About 29% of Sarawakians are Iban, a group that migrated from West Kalimantan's Kapuas River starting five to eight centuries ago. Also known as Sea Dayaks for their exploits as pirates, the Iban are traditionally rice growers and longhouse dwellers. A reluctance to renounce head-hunting enhanced the Iban's ferocious reputation.

The Bidayuh (8% of the population), many of whom also trace their roots to what is now West Kalimantan, are concentrated in the hills south and southwest of Kuching. Few Bidayuh still live in longhouses and adjacent villages sometimes speak different dialects.

Upland groups such as the Kelabit, Kayan and Kenyah (ie everywhere except the Bidayuh, Iban and coastal dwelling Melanau) are often

#### Famous

Singaporeans of Peranakan descent include Lee Kuan Yew, Dick Lee (singer, composer) and Goh Keng Swee (first prime minister of Singapore).

grouped under the term Orang Ulu ('upriver people'). There are also the Penan (see p447), originally a nomadic hunter-gatherer group living in northern Sarawak.

## SABAH

None of Sabah's 30 odd indigenous ethnicities are particularly keen on the term Dayak. The state's largest ethnic group, the Kadazan-Dusun, make up 18% of the population. Mainly Roman Catholic, the Kadazan and the Dusun share a common language and have similar customs; the former originally lived mainly in the state's western coastal areas and river deltas, while the latter inhabited the interior highlands.

The Murut (3.2% of the population) traditionally lived in the south-western hills bordering Kalimantan and Brunei, growing hill-rice and hunting with spears and blowpipes. They were soldiers for Brunei's sultans, and the last group in Sabah to abandon head-hunting.

## BRUNEI

Indigenous non-Malays, mainly Iban and Kelabit, account for less than 10% of Brunei's population.

## Multiculturalism

From the ashes of Malaysia's interracial riots of 1969, when distrust between the Malays and Chinese peaked, the country has managed to forge a more tolerant multicultural society. Though ethnic loyalties remain strong, the emergence of a single 'Malaysian' identity is now a much-discussed and lauded concept, even if it is far from being actually realised.

The government's *bumiputera* policy (see p559) has increased Malay involvement in the economy, albeit largely for an elite. This has helped defuse Malay fears and resentment of Chinese economic dominance, but at the expense of Chinese or Indian Malaysians being discriminated against by government policy. The reality is that the different communities coexist rather than mingle, intermarriage being rare and education still largely split along ethnic lines.

The term 'Dayak' was first used by colonial authorities in about 1840; it means upriver or interior in some local languages, human being in others.

Some Dayak societies, like the Iban and Bidayuh, are remarkably egalitarian, while others, including the Kayan, have a strict social hierarchy – now somewhat blurred – with classes of nobles (*maren*), aristocrats (*hipuy*), commoners (*panyin*) and slaves (*dipen*).

## LONGHOUSE LIFE

One of the most distinctive features of Dayak life is the longhouse (*rumah batang* or *rumah panjai*), which is essentially an entire village under one seemingly interminable roof. Longhouses take a variety of shapes and styles, but all are raised above the damp jungle floor on hardwood stilts and most are built on or near river banks.

The focus of longhouse life is the covered verandah, known as a *ruai* to the Iban, an *awah* to the Bidayuh and a *dapur* to the Kelabits (other groups use other terms). Residents use this communal space to socialise, engage in economic activities, cook and eat meals, and hold communal celebrations.

One wall of the verandah, which can be up to 250m long, is pierced by doors to individual families' *bilik* (apartments), where there's space for sleeping and storage. If you ask about the size of a longhouse, you will usually be told how many doors – ie family units – it has.

Like the rest of us, Dayaks love their mod cons, so longhouses where people actually live fuse age-old forms with contemporary conveniences – the resulting mash-up can see traditional bamboo-slat floors mixed with corrugated iron, linoleum, satellite dishes, and a car park out the front.

Most young Dayaks move away from the longhouse to seek higher education and jobs in the cities, but almost all keep close ties with home, returning for major family and community celebrations.

A poll by the independent Merdeka Centre, published in July 2010, showed that only 39% of non-Malays believed the government's 1Malaysia policy was a sincere effort to unite Malaysians of all ethnicities. That such a policy is needed at all speaks volumes about the underlying tensions and suspicions that continue to simmer beneath the apparent harmony.

Singaporean government policy has always promoted Singapore as a multicultural nation in which Chinese, Indians and Malays can live in equality and harmony while maintaining their distinct cultural identities. There are imbalances in the distribution of wealth and power among the racial groups, but on the whole multiculturalism seems to work much better in small-scale Singapore than it does in Malaysia.

Similarly, Brunei's small scale (not to mention great wealth) has allowed all its citizens, 30% of whom are not Muslim, to find common goals and live together harmoniously in a state run according to Islamic laws.

## The Region's Political Systems

### Malaysia

Malaysia is made up of 13 states and three federal territories (Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Labuan and Putrajaya). Each state has an assembly and government headed by a *menteri besar* (chief minister). Nine of the 13 states have hereditary rulers (sultans), while the remaining four have appointed governors as do the federal territories. In a pre-established order, every five years one of the sultans takes his turn in the ceremonial position of Yang di-Pertuan Agong (king). Since December 2011 the king, who is also the head of state and leader of the Islamic faith, has been Sultan Abdul Halim of Kedah. This is the second time the 83-year-old has held the position, the first being from 1970 to 1975.

At the time of writing Malaysia's prime minister is Najib Razak, who heads up the BN, a coalition of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and 13 other parties. The official opposition is Pakatan Rakyat (PR), led by Anwar Ibrahim; it's a coalition between Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), the (DAP) and Parti Islam se-Malaysia (PAS). They all sit in a two-house parliament, comprising a 70-member Senate (*Dewan Negara*; 26 members elected by the 13 state assemblies, 44 appointed by the king on the prime minister's recommendation) and a 222-member House of Representatives (*Dewan Rakyat*; elected from single-member districts). National and state elections are held every five years.

Malaysian politicians have been known to call in a *bomoh* – a traditional spiritual healer and spirit medium – during election campaigns to assist in their strategy and provide some foresight.

## TALKING THE TALK: THE REGION'S MANY LANGUAGES

As former British colonies, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei are all fantastic countries to visit for English speakers, but linguists will be pleased to tackle the region's multitude of other languages. Malaysia's national language is Bahasa Malaysia. This is often a cause of confusion for travellers, who logically give a literal translation to the two words and call it the 'Malaysian language'. In fact you cannot speak 'Malaysian'; the language is Malay.

Other languages commonly spoken in the region include Tamil, Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin, but there are also Chinese dialects, various other Indian and Orang Asli languages and even, in Melaka, a form of 16th-century Portuguese known as Cristang. All Malaysians speak Malay, and many are fluent in at least two other languages – a humbling thought for those of us who only speak English!

One final thing: you may be slightly confused by the English you do hear – both Malaysia and Singapore have developed their own unique way with the language, known respectively as Manglish and Singlish.

## WOMEN IN MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE & BRUNEI

Women had great influence in pre-Islamic Malay society; there were female leaders and the descendants of the Sumatran Minangkabau in Negeri Sembilan still have a matriarchal society. The arrival of Islam weakened the position of women in the region. Nonetheless, women were not cloistered or forced to wear full purdah as in the Middle East, and Malay women today still enjoy more freedom than their counterparts in many other Muslim societies.

As you travel throughout the region you'll see women taking part in all aspects of society: politics, big business, academia and family life. However, no less a figure than Marina Mahathir, prominent women's rights campaigner and daughter of the former prime minister, in 2006 compared the lot of Malaysia's Muslim women to that of blacks under apartheid in South Africa. In Mahathir's view her Muslim sisters are treated as second-class citizens held back by rules that don't apply to non-Muslim women.

Mahathir's outburst followed changes to Malaysia's Islamic family law that make it easier for Muslim men to take multiple wives, to divorce them and to take a share of their wives' property (similar laws already exist in Brunei, where the Sultan has two wives).

In Chinese-dominated Singapore women traditionally played a small role in public life. However, in recent years women have started to take up key positions in government and industry.

In Islamic Brunei more women wear the *tudong* (headscarf) than in Malaysia. Many work and there are even one or two female politicians. Since 2002 female Bruneians have been able to legally transfer their nationality to their children if the father is not Bruneian.

An anti-democratic hangover from the 1960s is the lack of local government elections – KL, Georgetown and Melaka's city councillors have all been government appointees since 1964. The DAP made reintroducing these elections part of their 2008 election campaign manifesto, but since taking power in Penang they have been unable to deliver through lack of the necessary federal approval.

### Singapore

Singapore is a parliamentary republic modelled on the United Kingdom's Westminster System. There are numerous political parties in Singapore, but one party, the People's Action Party (PAP), has dominated the political landscape since independence. The President of Singapore (since 2011, Tony Tan Keng Yam) is the democratically elected head of state, a traditionally ceremonial role that has since 1991 included powers to veto a small number of decisions, largely related to security and the armed service. The president appoints a prime minister (currently Lee Hsien Loong) as the head of government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the Parliament of Singapore.

Some critics say the electoral system makes it difficult for opposition parties to gain seats, entrenching the dominance of the PAP. This position is backed up by the strict (by Western standards) controls the government places on political assembly, freedom of expression and behaviours deemed antisocial.

However, the most recent election in 2011 would seem to indicate that things are changing: there was a decline in the popularity of the PAP, whose votes fell by 8.69%. Moreover, the number of contented seats was the highest it's been since Singapore achieved its independence in 1965. The biggest gains went to the Worker's Party (WP) whose political agenda



## ISLAM & POLITICS

Islam has always played a key role in Malaysian politics. The fundamentalist Islamic party PAS (Parti Islam se-Malaysia) has a policy aim to install an Islamic government in Malaysia. However, since it has teamed up with the PKR and DAP in the PR opposition alliance it has toned down this message and made a greater effort to reach out to non-Malays.

In an effort to outflank PAS's religious credentials, UMNO has from its dominant position with the BN been inching Malaysia closer to becoming more of a conservative Islamic state. Some local authorities have tried to ban or restrict dog ownership (conservative Muslims see dogs as unclean) and prosecute couples for holding hands or kissing in public. There was a move for policewomen, regardless of their religion, to wear the *tudong* (headscarf) at official parades and the controversy over the banning, then unbanning, of the Bible in Iban (see p572). There have also been several high-profile demolitions of non-Muslim religious buildings (including a couple of 19th-century Hindu temples) for allegedly not having proper planning permission.

focuses on everyday concerns of Singaporeans (wages, cost of living and healthcare, public transport, affordability of housing, and the disproportionately high salaries of ministers).

Local media, often accused of being mouthpieces of the government, gave fair and equal coverage to both the PAP and opposition parties. Social media, once banned in campaigning, played a huge part in the dissemination of information. Even Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong participated in an online chat (his first).

Post-election, it seems as though the PAP has realised that its position has gone from unshakable to slightly tenuous. A review of ministerial salaries was immediately mooted, and Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong and Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew both tendered their resignations. Senior Minister Goh perhaps put it best, describing the results as, 'a sea change in the political landscape'.

## Brunei

Although internationally classified as a constitutional monarchy, Brunei officially deems itself a *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB; Malay Islamic Monarchy) and is, in many ways, an absolute monarchy. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah has been in power since 1967; he appoints his advisory cabinet, privy council and council of succession. There is a 33-member legislative council, but those members are also appointed by the sultan; in 2004 there was talk of holding elections for 15 more seats, but those elections have never materialised.



# Religion

Freedom of religion is guaranteed throughout this mainly Islamic region, although in Brunei the Baha'i faith is banned you are and unlikely to encounter practising Jews. Hinduism's roots in the region long pre-date Islam, and the various Chinese religions are also strongly entrenched. Christianity has a presence, more so in Singapore than Peninsula Malaysia where it has never been strong. In Malaysian Borneo many of the indigenous people have converted to Christianity, yet others still follow their animist traditions.

## Islam

Islam most likely came to the region in the 14th century with south Indian traders; it was not one of Arabia's more orthodox Islamic traditions. It absorbed rather than conquered existing beliefs, and was adopted peacefully by Malaysia's coastal trading ports. Islamic sultanates replaced Hindu kingdoms – though the Hindu concept of kings remained – and the Hindu traditions of *adat* continued despite Islamic law dominating.

Malay ceremonies and beliefs still exhibit pre-Islamic traditions, but most Malays are ardent Muslims – to suggest otherwise would cause great offence. With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the calls to introduce Islamic law and purify the practices of Islam have increased; yet, while the federal government of Malaysia is keen to espouse Muslim ideals, it is wary of religious extremism.

## Key Beliefs & Practices

Most Malaysian Muslims are Sunnis, but all Muslims share a common belief in the Five Pillars of Islam:

**Shahadah (the declaration of faith)** 'There is no God but Allah; Mohammed is his Prophet.'

**Salat (prayer)** Ideally five times a day, in which the muezzin (prayer leader) calls the faithful to prayer from the minarets of every mosque.

**Zakat (tax)** Usually taking the form of a charitable donation.

**Sawm (fasting)** Includes observing the fasting month of Ramadan.

**Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca)** Every Muslim aspires to do the hajj at least once in their lifetime.

Muslim dietary laws forbid alcohol, pork and all pork-based products. Restaurants where it's OK for Muslims to dine will be clearly labelled halal; this is a stricter definition than places that label themselves simply 'pork-free'.

A radical Islamic movement has not taken serious root in Malaysia but religious conservatism has grown over recent years. For foreign visitors, the most obvious sign of this is the national obsession with propriety, which extends to newspaper polemics on female modesty and raids by the police on 'immoral' public establishments, which can include clubs and bars where Muslims may be drinking.

## ADAT

*Adat*, with its roots in the region's Hindu period and earlier, is customary law that places great emphasis on collective rather than individual responsibility and on maintaining harmony.

*Islam in Malaysia: Perceptions & Facts* by Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin, the former Mufti of Perlis, is a collection of articles on aspects of the faith as practised in Malaysia.

## ISLAMIC FESTIVALS

The highpoint of the Islamic festival calendar is Ramadan, when Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan always occurs in the ninth month of the Muslim calendar and lasts between 29 and 30 days, based on sightings of the moon. Fifteen days before the start of Ramadan, on Nisfu Night, it is believed the souls of the dead visit their homes. On Laylatul Qadr (Night of Grandeur), during Ramadan, Muslims celebrate the arrival of the Quran on earth, before its revelation by the Prophet Mohammed.

**Hari Raya Puasa** (also known as Hari Raya Aidilfitri) marks the end of the month-long fast, with two days of joyful celebration and feasting. Hari Raya Puasa is the major holiday of the Muslim calendar and it can be difficult to find accommodation, particularly on the coast. The start of Ramadan moves forward 11 days every year in line with the Muslim lunar calendar.

The other major Islamic festivals celebrated across the region are:

**Hari Raya Haji** A two-day festival usually in November marking the successful completion of the hajj – the pilgrimage to Mecca – and commemorating the willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim (the biblical Abraham) to sacrifice his son. Many shops, offices and tourist attractions close and locals consume large amounts of cakes and sweets.

**Mawlid al-Nabi** Usually in March and celebrating the birth of the prophet Mohammed.

**Awal Muharram** The Muslim New Year which falls in November or December.

Sisters in Islam ([www.sistersinislam.org.my](http://www.sistersinislam.org.my)) is a website run by and for Malaysian Muslim women who refuse to be bullied by patriarchal interpretations of Islam.

More Muslim women wear the hijab (a head covering also known regionally as the *tudong*) today than, say, 20 years ago. In 2011, a young Muslim filmmaker Norhayati Kaprawi made the documentary *Siapa Aku?* (Who Am I?), which examines some of the reason behind this interviewing a spectrum of Malaysian women from across the country. Shamsul Amri Bahrudin, director of the Institute of Ethnic Studies at the National University of Malaysia, is quoted within the film as saying that ‘conformity is the most dominating factor on why women in Malaysia wear a *tudung*’.

On the other hand, the *New York Times* in 2011 reported that Malaysia was leading the way in the Islamic world with regard to embracing women as preachers and teachers of the Muslim faith, an area traditionally dominated by men, citing Zaleha Kamaruddin, the first female rector appointed to head the country's International Islamic University. However, women preachers still are not allowed to lead prayers at mosques.

## Chinese Religions

The Chinese in the region usually follow a mix of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Buddhism takes care of the afterlife, Confucianism looks after the political and moral aspects of life, and Taoism contributes animistic beliefs to teach people to maintain harmony with the universe. But to say that the Chinese have three religions is too simplistic a view of their traditional religious life. At the first level Chinese religion is animistic, with a belief in the innate vital energy in rocks, trees, rivers and springs. At the second level people from the distant past, both real and mythological, are worshipped as gods. Overlaid on this are popular Taoist, Mahayana Buddhist and Confucian beliefs.

On a day-to-day level most Chinese are much less concerned with the high-minded philosophies and asceticism of the Buddha, Confucius or Lao Zi than they are with the pursuit of worldly success, the appeasement of the dead and the spirits, and seeking knowledge about the future. Chinese religion incorporates elements of what Westerners might call ‘superstition’ – if you want your fortune told, for instance, you go to a temple. The other thing to remember is that Chinese religion is polytheistic. Apart

The most popular Chinese gods and local deities, or *shen*, are Kuan Yin, the goddess of mercy; Kuan Ti, the god of war and wealth; and Toh Peh Kong, a local deity representing the spirit of the pioneers and found only outside China.

from the Buddha, Lao Zi and Confucius there are many divinities, such as house gods, and gods and goddesses for particular professions.

## Hinduism

Hinduism in the region dates back at least 1500 years and there are Hindu influences in cultural traditions, such as *wayang kulit* (shadow-puppet theatre) and the wedding ceremony. However, it is only in the last 100 years or so, following the influx of Indian contract labourers and settlers, that it has again become widely practised.

Hinduism has three basic practices: puja (worship), the cremation of the dead, and the rules and regulations of the caste system. Although still very strong in India, the caste system was never significant in Malaysia, mainly because the labourers brought here from India were mostly from the lower classes.

Hinduism has a vast pantheon of deities, although the one omnipresent god usually has three physical representations: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer or reproducer. All three gods are usually shown with four arms, but Brahma has the added advantage of four heads to represent his all-seeing presence.

## Animism

The animist religions of Malaysia's indigenous peoples are as diverse as the peoples themselves. While animism does not have a rigid system of tenets or codified beliefs, it can be said that animists perceive natural phenomena to be animated by various spirits or deities, and a complex system of practices is used to propitiate these spirits.

Ancestor worship is also a common feature of animist societies; departed souls are considered to be intermediaries between this world and the next. Examples of elaborate burial rituals can still be found in some parts of Sarawak, where the remains of monolithic burial markers and funerary objects still dot the jungle around longhouses in the Kelabit

## DAYAK ANIMISM

Dayak animism considers the hornbill a powerful spirit – the bird is honoured in dance and ceremony and its feathers treasured.

## THAIPUSAM

The most spectacular Hindu festival in Malaysia and Singapore is Thaipusam, a wild parade of confrontingly invasive body piercings. The festival, which originated in Tamil Nadu (but is now banned in India), happens every year in the Hindu month of Thai (January/February) and is celebrated with the most gusto at the Batu Caves, just outside Kuala Lumpur.

The greatest spectacle is the devotees who subject themselves to seemingly masochistic acts as fulfilment for answered prayers. Many carry offerings of milk in *paal kudam* (milk pots), often connected to the skin by hooks. Even more striking are the *vel kavadi* – great cages of spikes that pierce the skin of the carrier and are decorated with peacock feathers, pictures of deities and flowers. Some penitents go as far as piercing their tongues and cheeks with hooks, skewers and tridents.

The festival is the culmination of around a month of prayer, a vegetarian diet and other ritual preparations, such as abstinence from sex or sleeping on a hard floor. While it looks excruciating, a trance-like state stops participants from feeling pain; later the wounds are treated with lemon juice and holy ash to prevent scarring. As with the practice of firewalking, only the truly faithful should attempt the ritual. It is said that insufficiently prepared devotees keep doctors especially busy over the Thaipusam festival period with skin lacerations, or by collapsing after the strenuous activities.

Thaipusam is also celebrated in Penang at the Nattukotai Chettiar Temple and the Waterfall Hilltop Temple, and in Johor Bahru at the Sri Thandayuthabani Temple. Ipoh attracts a large number of devotees, who follow the procession from the Sri Mariamar Temple in Buntong to the Sri Subramaniam Temple in Gunung Cheroh. In Singapore, Hindus march from the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple on Serangoon Rd to the Chettiar Hindu Temple.

Highlands. However, most of these are no longer maintained and they're being rapidly swallowed up by the fast-growing jungle.

In Malaysian Borneo, Dayak animism is known collectively as Kaharingan. Carvings, totems, tattoos and other objects (including, in earlier times, head-hunting skulls) are used to repel bad spirits, attract good spirits and soothe spirits that may be upset. Totems at entrances to villages and longhouses are markers for the spirits.

## Religious Issues

### Freedom of Religion?

Islam is Malaysia's state religion, which has an impact on the cultural and social life of the country at several levels. Government institutions and banks, for example, are closed for two hours at lunchtime on Friday to allow Muslims to attend Friday prayers.

Government censors, with Islamic sensitivities in mind, dictate what can be performed on public stages or screened in cinemas. This has led to Beyoncé cancelling her shows when asked to adhere to strict guidelines on dress and her performance style, and to the banning of movies like *Schindler's List* and *Babe* – the themes of Jews being saved from the Holocaust and a cute pig star are not to Muslim tastes. In 2008, Malaysia's leading Islamic council issued an edict against yoga, fearing the exercises could corrupt Muslims.

*Syariah* (Islamic law) is the preserve of state governments, as is the establishment of Muslim courts of law, which since 1988 cannot be overruled by secular courts. This has had a negative impact on Muslims wishing to change their religion and divorced parents who cannot agree on which religion to raise their children by. The end result is that Malaysian Muslims who change their religion or practise no faith at all rarely make their choice official.

In theory Brunei's constitution also allows for the practice of religions other than the official Sunni Islam. However, as Freedom House ([www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)) reports, proselytizing by non-Muslims is prohibited and other forms of Islam are actively discouraged. Christianity suffers censorship. Marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is not allowed. With permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs Muslims can convert their faith, but in reality conversion is practically impossible.

### Inter-Religious Relations

Muslim-Christian relations in Malaysia were clouded in 2010 as the result of a campaign by Muslim fundamentalists to forbid Christians from referring to God as 'Allah' in Bahasa Malaysia. The Home Ministry seized 35,000 Bahasa Malaysia Bibles at Kuching's port, prompting the Christian Federation of Malaysia to lodge a formal complaint with PM Najib Razak; the Bibles were later released.

Anecdotal evidence from across the region indicates that whereas in the past the various religion communities participated in each other's communal festivities (Hari Raya, Chinese New Year), such easy mingling is becoming less frequent these days, especially among younger people.

Intra-religious relations in Sabah and Sarawak are less fraught than on the mainland, but Christians and Chinese (the groups overlap to a certain degree) and Muslim moderates often express concern that the island – especially Sabah – is not immune to the Islamist winds blowing in from other parts of the country.

### Anti-Semitism

The only part of the region where you'll find a community of practising Jews is in Singapore. Penang once had a Jewish community large

enough to support a synagogue (closed in 1976) and there's been a Jewish cemetery in George Town since 1805. Elsewhere in Malaysia and Brunei, Jewish life is practically unknown.

Sadly, anti-Semitism, ostensibly tied to criticism of Israel, is a feature of Malaysia and Brunei. In the region's bookshops it's not difficult to find anti-Semitic publications like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Former prime minister Mahathir is the most infamously outspoken Malaysian anti-Semite: in 2003 he made a speech to an Islamic leadership conference claiming the USA is a tool of Jewish overlords, and he once cancelled a planned tour of Malaysia by the New York Philharmonic because the program included work by a Jewish composer.

More recently, after the July 2011 Bersih rally in KL to demand greater transparency in electoral law, the UMNO-owned Malay newspaper *Utusan Malaysia* claimed such demonstrations would make the country vulnerable to interference by Jews and Israel. The Malaysian government later distanced itself from the newspaper's comments.

Israeli passport holders are not permitted to enter Malaysia without clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs, and very few local Muslims differentiate between Israelis and Jews generally – something worth noting if you're Jewish and travelling in the region.

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The Jewish Community of Singapore website ([www.singaporejews.com](http://www.singaporejews.com)) contains information about the history of Jews on the island and the current community.

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# Arts & Media

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei are not widely known for their arts, which is a shame as there is much creativity here, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore. Traditional art forms like *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) and *mak yong* (dance and music performances) continue alongside contemporary art, drama and filmmaking. There's a distinctive look to Malaysia's vernacular architecture as well as a daring and originality in modern constructions. The region also produces authors who are gaining attention in the wider world.

Singapore has boosted spending on arts across the board with the aim of making the island state the arts hub of the region, in stark contrast to Malaysia, where very little public money is assigned to the arts. Even private sponsors like Petronas are pulling back their support; in June 2012, the Petronas Performing Art Group took their final bows after 22 years.

## Literature

Writers W Somerset Maugham, Joseph Conrad and Noel Coward were inspired by the region in the early 20th century. The classic colonial expat experience is recounted by Anthony Burgess in *The Malaysian Trilogy* written in the 1950s. In the late 1960s Paul Theroux lived in Singapore, which, together with Malaysia, forms the backdrop to his novel *Saint Jack* and his short-story collection *The Consul's Wife*.

Leading lights of the contemporary Malaysian literary scene include Tash Aw ([www.tash-aw.com](http://www.tash-aw.com)), whose debut novel, *The Harmony Silk Factory*, won the 2005 Whitbread First Novel Award; the Man Booker Prize nominated author Tan Twan Eng ([www.tantwaneng.com](http://www.tantwaneng.com)), whose literature fuses a fascination with Malaysia's past and the impact of Japanese culture; and Preeta Samarasan (<http://preetasamarasan.com>), whose novel *Evening is the Whole Day* shines a light on the experiences of an Indian immigrant family living on the outskirts of Ipoh in the early 1980s.

*Foreign Bodies* and *Mammon Inc* by Hwee Hwee Tan ([www.geocities.com/hweehwee\\_tan](http://www.geocities.com/hweehwee_tan)) are among the best of contemporary Singaporean fiction. Tan pinpoints the peculiar dilemmas and contradictions facing Singaporean youth. Other celebrated novels by Singaporean writers include *Tigers in Paradise* by Philip Jeyaretnam, *Juniper Loa* by Lin Yutang, *Tangerine* by Colin Cheong and *Playing Madame Mao* by Lau Siew Mai.

Several small-press publishers have released works of poetry, fiction and even children's books. Of note, Booksactually (p488), an independent book store in Singapore, publishes up-and-coming authors via its Maths Paper Press imprint. Encouragingly, the National Arts Council of Singapore has beefed up its program with competitions and events like the Singapore Children's Literature Festival.

### Contemporary Malaysian Fiction

- » *The Harmony Silk Factory* (Tash Aw)
- » *The Gift of Rain* (Tan Twan Eng)
- » *Evening is the Whole Day* (Preeta Samarasan)
- » *Body 2 Body: A Malaysian Queer Anthology* (Jerome Kugan & Pang Khue Teik, eds)



## Architecture

Malaysia and Singapore have both made their mark in the world of modern architecture with iconic buildings like KL's Petronas Towers and the Marina Bay Sands complex in Singapore. Other interesting skyscrapers and civic buildings in the cities take inspiration from both local culture and the environment – for example the Tabung Haji and Menara Maybank buildings in KL, both designed by Hijjas Kasturi.

Vividly painted and handsomely proportioned, traditional wooden Malay houses are also perfectly adapted to the hot, humid conditions of the region. Built on stilts, with high, peaked roofs, they take advantage of even the slightest cooling breeze. Further ventilation is achieved by full-length windows, no internal partitions, and latticelike grilles in the walls. The layout of a traditional Malay house reflects Muslim sensibilities. There are separate areas for men and women, as well as distinct areas where guests of either sex may be entertained.

Although their numbers are dwindling, this type of house has not disappeared altogether. The best places to see examples are in the *kampung* of Peninsular Malaysia, particularly along the east coast in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu. Here you'll see that roofs are often tiled, showing a Thai and Cambodian influence.

In Melaka, the Malay house has a distinctive tiled front stairway leading up to the front verandah – examples can be seen around Kampung Morten. The Minangkabau-style houses found in Negeri Sembilan are the most distinctive of the *kampung* houses, with curved roofs resembling buffalo horns; the design is imported from Sumatra.

Few Malay-style houses have survived Singapore's rapid modernisation – the main place they remain is on Pulau Ubin. Instead, the island state has some truly magnificent examples of Chinese shophouse architecture, particularly in Chinatown, Emerald Hill (off Orchard Rd) and around Katong. There are also the distinctive 'black and white' bungalows built during colonial times; find survivors lurking in the residential areas off Orchard Rd. Most noticeable of all, though, will be the rank upon rank of Housing Development Board (HDB) flats that the vast majority of Singaporeans call home.

Despite its oil wealth, there's little that's flashy in the architecture of Brunei's modest capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, where the city's skyline is dominated by the striking Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque. It's quite a different story, however, out at Jerudong, home to the Sultan's opulent palace and the eye-boggling Empire Hotel.

## Drama & Dance

Traditional Malay dances include *menora*, a dance-drama of Thai origin performed by an all-male cast dressed in grotesque masks; and the similar *mak yong*, where the participants are female. These performances often take place at Puja Ketek, Buddhist festivals held at temples near

The cartoonist and artist Lat is a national institution in Malaysia.

His witty sketches turn up in the *New Straits Times* newspaper, advertisements, and books including *Kampung Boy*.

### Online Arts Resources

- » Arts.com.my ([www.arts.com.my](http://www.arts.com.my))
- » Malaysia Design Archive ([www.malaysiadesignarchive.org](http://www.malaysiadesignarchive.org))
- » National Arts Council Singapore ([www.nac.gov.sg](http://www.nac.gov.sg))

### SHADOW PUPPETERY

It's in east coast Peninsula Malaysian towns like Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu that you're most likely to see *wayang kulit* – shadow-puppet performances, similar to those of Java in Indonesia, which retell tales from Hindu epic the Ramayana. It's a feat of endurance both for performer and audience since the shadow plays, which often take place at weddings or after the harvest, can last for many hours.

In November 2008 Malaysian composer Yii Kah Hoe collaborated with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and the *wayang kulit* troupe Istamuzika to perform the modern *wayang kulit* piece *Bayang*.

## CHINESE OPERA

In Malaysia and Singapore *wayang*, Chinese opera, is derived from the Cantonese variety. The performances mix dialogue, music, song and dance; what they lack in literary nuance they make up for with garish costumes and the crashing music that follows the action. Scenery and props are minimal; it's the action that is important, and even for the uninitiated it's usually easy to get the gist of the plot.

Performances can go for an entire evening. Even though the acting is very stylised, and the music can be discordant to Western ears, they are worth seeing. Free street performances are held in the Chinatown areas of KL and Singapore, Melaka and Penang's George Town during important festivals like Chinese New Year (January/February), the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts (August/September) and the Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods (September/October).

the Thai border in Kelantan. There's also the *rodat*, a dance from Terengganu, and the *joget*, an upbeat dance with Portuguese origins, often performed at Malay weddings by professional dancers; in Melaka it's better known as *chakunchak*.

When it comes to contemporary drama and dance, Singapore tends to have the edge. There's a lot of interesting work by local theatre companies like Action Theatre ([www.action.org.sg](http://www.action.org.sg)), Wild Rice ([www.wildrice.com.sg](http://www.wildrice.com.sg)), Toy Factory Ensemble ([www.toyfactory.com.sg](http://www.toyfactory.com.sg)) and the Singapore Repertory Theatre ([www.srt.com.sg](http://www.srt.com.sg)). Singapore's leading dance company, Singapore Dance Theatre ([www.singaporedance theatre.com](http://www.singaporedance theatre.com)), puts on performances ranging from classical ballet to contemporary dance.

## Music

### Traditional & Classical

Traditional Malay music is based largely on *gendang* (drums), but other percussion instruments include the gong and various tribal instruments made from seashells, coconut shells and bamboo. The Indonesian-style *gamelan* (a traditional orchestra of drums, gongs and wooden xylophones) also crops up on ceremonial occasions. The Malay *nobat* uses a mixture of percussion and wind instruments to create formal court music. For Western-style orchestration, attend a performance at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas at the base of the Petronas Towers.

Islamic and Chinese influences are felt in the music of *dondang sayang* (Chinese-influenced romantic songs), and *hadrah* (Islamic chants, sometimes accompanied by dance and music). The KL-based Dama Orchestra ([www.damaorchestra.com](http://www.damaorchestra.com)) combines modern and traditional Chinese instruments and play songs that conjure up the mood of 1920s and 1930s Malaysia.

In Singapore, catch the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO, at the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay) and the well-respected Singapore Chinese Orchestra which plays not only traditional and symphonic Chinese music but also Indian, Malay and Western pieces.

### Popular Music

Snapping at the high heels of demure Malaysian pop songstress Siti Nurhaliza (<http://sitizone.com>) are Zee Avi ([www.zeeavi.com](http://www.zeeavi.com)), who was signed by the US label Bushfire Records for her eponymous debut CD; and the sultry Yuna ([www.yunamusic.com](http://www.yunamusic.com)), who has also cut a US record deal.

Winner of three AIM awards – the Malaysian equivalent of the Grammys – in 2004 for his debut album *Monumental*, singer-songwriter

*Silat*, or *bersilat*, is a Malay martial art that originated in 15th-century Melaka. Today it is a highly refined and stylised activity, more akin to dance than self-defence.

Reshmonu ([www.reshmonu.com](http://www.reshmonu.com)) blends local rhythms and instruments into r'n'b and latin grooves like samba and bossanova.

Singapore's pop music scene creates only a small blip internationally; visitors should look out for local festivals, like the annual Baybeats ([www.baybeats.com](http://www.baybeats.com)), showcasing alternative singers and bands.

## Cinema

The heyday of Malaysia's film industry was the 1950s, when P Ramlee took to the silver screen. This Malaysian icon acted in 66 films, recorded 300 songs and was also a successful film director – his directorial debut *Penarik Becha* (The Trishaw Man; 1955) is a classic of Malay cinema.

Yasmin Ahamad is considered to be the most culturally important Malaysian filmmaker since Ramlee. Her film *Sepeh* (2005), about a Chinese boy and Malay girl falling in love, cut across the country's race and language barriers upsetting many devout Malays, as did her follow up, *Gubra* (2006), which dared to take a sympathetic approach to prostitutes. Causing less of stir were *Mukshin* (2007), a romantic tale about Malay village life, and *Talentine* (2009), about an inter-school performing arts contest, and what would be Yasmin's final film before her death from a stroke the same year. Find out more about her work from Amir Muhammad's tribute book *Yasmin Ahamad's Films* ([www.mataharibooks.com](http://www.mataharibooks.com)).

## TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

The region's crafts have much rustic beauty and incorporate traditional designs. Check out the online shop **Gerai OA** ([www.elevyn.com/shop/geraioa](http://www.elevyn.com/shop/geraioa)), which sells crafts by Malaysia's indigenous minorities.

» **Batik** Batik is made across Malaysia, but Kelantan and Terengganu are its true homes. Produced by drawing or printing a pattern on fabric with wax and then dyeing the material, batik can be made into clothes, homewares, or simply be created as works of art.

» **Basketry & Weaving** The baskets of the Iban, Kayan, Kenyah and Penan are highly regarded. Weaving material include rattan, bamboo, swamp nipah grass and pandanus palms. Related weaving techniques produce sleeping mats, seats and materials for shelters. While each ethnic group has certain distinctive patterns, hundreds or even thousands of years of trade and interaction has led to an intermixing of patterns.

» **Kain Songket** This hand-woven fabric with gold and silver threads through the material is a speciality of Kelantan and Terengganu. Clothes made from it are usually reserved for important festivals and occasions. You can also buy pieces of the fabric for decorative purposes.

» **Kites & Puppets** The *wau bulan* (moon kite) of Kelantan is a traditional paper and bamboo crescent-shaped kite as large as 3m in length and breadth, while kite makers in Terengganu specialise in the *wau kucing* (cat kite). *Wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) are made from buffalo hide in the shape of characters from epic Hindu legends.

» **Metalwork** Kelantan is famed for its silversmiths, who work in a variety of ways and specialise in filigree and repoussé work. In the latter, designs are hammered through the silver from the underside. Brasswork is an equally traditional skill in Kuala Terengganu. Objects crafted out of pewter (an alloy of tin) are synonymous with Selangor, where you'll find the Royal Selangor Pewter Factory as well as other pewter manufacturers.

» **Woodcarving** The Orang Asli tribe of Hma' Meri, who live in a village on Pulau Carey, off the coast of Selangor, are renowned woodcarving craftsmen. In Malaysian Borneo the Kenyah and Kayan peoples are also skilled woodcarvers, producing hunting-charms and ornate knife-hilts known as *parang ilang*.

Amir Muhammad's movies also push the boundaries on issues that the government prefers not be discussed in the public arena. His movie *Lelaki Komunis Terakhir* (The Last Communist Man; 2006) was banned, along with his follow-up movie *Apa Khabar Orang Kampung* (Village People Radio Show; 2007).

Singapore has never been a leading light in film production, but during the 1990s some local movies began to gain international attention, in particular Yonfan's *Bugis Street* and Eric Khoo's *Mee Pok Man*, both released in 1995. Khoo's *12 Storeys* (1997) and more recent *Be with Me* (2005) and *My Magic* (2008) have since featured in competition at Cannes.

Royston Tan continues his love/hate relationship with Singapore's censors. His first feature, *15*, had 27 scenes snipped. In response, he produced the hilarious short music video *Cut* (available on YouTube). His last two films, *881* and *12 Lotus*, were Chinese-language features.

## Visual Arts

Among the most interesting and internationally successful contemporary Malaysian artists are Jalaini Abu Hassan ('Jai'), Wong Hoy Cheong, landscape painter Wong Perng Fey, and Australian-trained multimedia artist Yee I-Lann. Amron Omar has focused for nearly 30 years on *silat* (a Malay martial art) as a source of inspiration for his paintings – several are in the National Visual Art Gallery in KL. A young contemporary sculptor who's making a name for himself internationally is Abdul Multhalib Musa. His work has won awards and he created several pieces in Beijing for the 2008 Olympics.

In Singapore the visual-arts scene is also vibrant, with painting, sculpture and multimedia the vehicles of choice for dynamic explorations into the tensions between Western art practices and the perceived erosion of traditional values. Highly regarded local artists include Da Wu Tang, Vincent Leow, Jason Lim and Zulkiflee Mahmud, all of whom took part in the 2007 Venice Biennale.

## Media

For the last decade, since Mahathir's retirement as prime minister in 2003, there has been noticeably more freedom in what the media covers in Malaysia. The stringent laws haven't changed, but the mind-set of journalists has and there's less self-censorship than in the past. Malaysia has one of the liveliest blogospheres of the region, with the practically unfettered expansion of politically linked websites and blogs proof of a more liberal attitude.

The Singaporean government restricts freedom of speech and freedom of the press, as well as other civil and political rights. Censorship of sexual, political and racially or religiously sensitive content is extensive. However, the government's attitude towards online media has been relaxed since 2006. Once banned during elections, blogs and social media are now allowed as part of the media coverage. Social media increasingly plays a part in the Singapore mediascape, with local newspapers often quoting bloggers and reporting on issues generated in the blogosphere.

Freedom House has listed Brunei as 'not free' when it comes to the media. The government can arbitrarily shut down media outlets and bar distribution of foreign publications. Journalists can be jailed for up to three years for reporting 'false and malicious' news. This said, there have been no reports of attacks on or harassment of journalists in recent years. Both the country's main newspapers, the *Borneo Bulletin* (owned by members of the Sultan's family) and the *Borneo Times*, are believed to practise self-censorship.

The Brunei Art Forum in Bandar Seri Begawan promotes local contemporary artists (mostly painters) including Zakaria Bin Omar, Haji Padzil Haji Ahmad, Pengiran Mohd Roslan Pg Haji Bakar and Teck Kwang Swee, and fosters international links.



# Food & Drink

Centuries of trade, colonisation, and immigration have left their culinary mark on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei in the form of cuisines so multifaceted it would take months of nonstop grazing to truly grasp their breadth. Nowhere else in Asia are the elements of three great culinary traditions – those of China, India and the Malay archipelago – so intertwined. The result is dishes both starkly monocultural (think Chinese wonton noodles and the southern Indian rolled ‘pancakes’ called *dosa*) and confusingly – but delightfully – multicultural (*debal*, a Melakan Eurasian stew, marries European-originated red wine vinegar, Indian black-mustard seeds, Chinese soy sauce and Malay candlenuts).

## Flavours

Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore have similar populations, share a tropical climate and were all at one time home to important trading ports along the spice route. As a result, their cuisines are characterised by comparable flavours and are built on a shared foundation of basic ingredients.

Chillies (*cili*), both fresh and dried, are a kitchen staple. (Chilli-phobes need not worry; the region boasts plenty of mild dishes too.) Capsicum stars in *sambal*, a dip cum relish; its many varieties incorporate ingredients ranging from dried shrimp to fruit and are served alongside humble soup noodles, lavish rice spreads and every meal in between. Chillies are the base of *rempah* (called *bumbu* in Brunei), a pounded paste also containing, at its most basic, garlic and shallots, which forms the foundation of curries, soups and stews.

Herbs and aromatics like coriander, mint, *daun kesom* (polygonum, a peppery, slightly astringent leaf also known as laksa leaf), celery leaves (from the slender, jade-green Asian variety rather than thick-stemmed, mild-flavoured Western celery) *daun kunyit* (turmeric leaves), curry leaves, lemongrass and wild lime leaves impart a fresh liveliness to curries and noodle dishes. Fragrant pandan leaves are often called ‘South-east Asian vanilla’ for the light, slightly sweet essence they lend to sweets. (Pandan is also a natural deodoriser, so don’t be surprised to see a bundle of leaves stashed beneath the rear window of your taxi).

Sourness is also an important facet of the region’s cuisines. *Asam* (sour) curries and noodle dishes derive piquancy primarily from tamarind and *asam keping*, the flesh of a tart fruit related to the mangosteen that’s sliced into thin coins and dried. Malay cooks also make sour soups and sambals with a tiny green fruit called *belimbing*, a relative of the star fruit. Both limes and calamansi, a cross between lime and Mandarin orange, are juiced for salads; slices are served with laksa and other noodle dishes.

Grated coconut is dry-fried, sometimes with dried chillies and other

## Recommended Websites & Blogs

» Chubby Hubby  
([www.chubby-hubby.net/blog](http://www.chubby-hubby.net/blog))

» Eating Asia  
([www.eatingasia.typepad.com](http://www.eatingasia.typepad.com))

» Fried Chillies  
([www.friedchillies.com](http://www.friedchillies.com))

» ieatishootipost  
([www.ieatishootipost.sg](http://www.ieatishootipost.sg))

» Makansutra  
([www.makan-sutra.com](http://www.makan-sutra.com))

» Masak-masak  
([www.masak-masak.blogspot.com](http://www.masak-masak.blogspot.com))

» Rasa Malaysia  
([www.rasamalaysia.com](http://www.rasamalaysia.com))

» What2See: The Best of Penang Food! ([www.what2seeonline.com](http://www.what2seeonline.com))

When the Portuguese conquered Melaka with a fleet launched from Goa they brought along vindaloo, which morphed into the Cristang-inspired dish *debal*.

## FOR THE LOVE OF SAMBAL

There are as many variations of *sambal* as there are Malay cooks. Mild to fiery, made with fresh or dried chillies, and incorporating ingredients from dried fish to fruit, this cross between a dip and a relish accompanies simple soup noodles, lavish feasts and every meal in between. The most common variation is *sambal belacan*, made from fresh or dried red chillies pounded with dried *belacan* (fermented prawn paste). If its pungent punch puts you off initially, try, try again – *sambal belacan* is rarely loved at first bite but often proves addictive in the long run.

Many upscale restaurants add a 10% service charge. If you see '++' at the bottom of your menu, add 15% for government taxes and service charge.

flavourings, to make *kerisik*, a garnish for rice, and is an ingredient in many *kuih* (sweets), where it's often paired with *gula Melaka*, a distinctive dark brown sugar made by boiling the sap collected from cut flower stalks of the coconut palm.

*Belacan* (dried shrimp paste) embodies the Malaysian, Singaporean and Bruneian love of fishy flavours. A black, sticky-sweet version native to Penang, called *hae ko*, dresses vegetable and fruit salad (*rojak*) and is stirred into *asam laksa*, a sour fishy noodle dish, right before serving. Other well-loved condiments made from the fruits of the sea include *cincalok* (*cencalu* in Brunei), krill mixed with salt and sugar and left to ferment (it's often eaten with rice and eggs) and *budu*, a sludgy long-fermented anchovy sauce favoured by Malay cooks. These piscine condiments lend umami to many a *sambal*, dipping sauce and curry and, though certainly odoriferous, can be addictive; after a few weeks of sampling you may find yourself wishing you could sneak a block of *belacan* past your home country's custom agents.

No local kitchen is complete without sauces that were originally introduced to the region by the Chinese: soy sauce (and its sweetened cousin *kecap manis*), fermented salted bean paste (*taucu*), oyster sauce and hoisin sauce.

## Staples Curries

Though chillies are a mainstay of Malaysian cuisine, few dishes are prohibitively spicy. Curries start with *rempah* – a pounded paste of chillies and aromatics like garlic, shallots, *serai* (lemongrass), *kunyit* (turmeric) and *lengkuas* (galangal). Dried spices – coriander seeds, fennel seeds, cumin, fenugreek – might also be included, especially if the dish is Indian-influenced. Curries and sweets are made *lemak* (fatty and rich) with coconut milk.

## Rice & Noodles

The locals would be hard-pressed to choose between *nasi* (rice) and *mee* (noodles) – one or the other features in almost every meal. Rice is boiled in water or stock to make porridge (*congee* or *bubur*), fried with chillies and shallots for *nasi goreng*, and packed into banana leaf-lined bamboo tubes, cooked, then sliced and doused with coconut-and-vegetable gravy for the Malay dish *lontong*. Glutinous (sticky) rice – both white and black – is a common *kuih* ingredient; Malays mix glutinous rice with sugar and allow it to ferment for sweet-and-sour, slightly alcoholic *tapai*, which goes nicely with ice cream.

Rice flour, mixed with water and allowed to ferment, becomes the batter for Indian *idli*, steamed cakes to eat with dhal (stewed lentils), and *apam*, crispy-chewy pancakes cooked in special concave pans. Rice flour-based dough is transformed into sweet dumplings like *onde-onde*,

'Ketchup' is thought to be derived from the Hokkien word *ke-tsiap*, which describes a fermented fish sauce brought by Chinese traders to Melaka, where it was encountered by Europeans.

coconut flake-dusted, pandan-hued balls hiding a filling of semi-liquid *gula Melaka* (palm sugar).

Many varieties of noodle are made from rice flour, both the wide, flat *kway teow* and *mee hoon* (or *bee hoon*, rice vermicelli). *Chee cheong fun* – steamed rice flour sheets – are sliced into strips and topped with sweet brown and red chilli sauces; stubby *loh see fun* (literally ‘rat-tail noodles’) are stewed in a claypot with dark soy sauce.

Round yellow noodles form the basis of the Muslim Indian dish *mee mamak*. The Chinese favourite *won ton mee*, found anywhere in the region, comprises wheat-and-egg vermicelli, a clear meat broth and silky-skinned dumplings.

A primary starch for Bruneians and some indigenous communities in the eastern Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak is sago flour, laboriously extracted from the trunk of a variety of palm tree. In Brunei, it’s mixed with water and cooked to make *ambuyat* (or *ambulung*), a sticky whitish paste. It was popularised during WWII, when the Japanese invaded Borneo and cut off the rice supply.

## Meat & Seafood

In Malaysia, religion often dictates a diner’s choice of protein. *Haram* (forbidden) to Muslims, *babi* (pork) is the king of meats for Chinese; some hawkers even drizzle noodles with melted lard. Whether roasted till crispy-skinned (*char yoke*) or marinated and barbecued till sweetly charred (*char stew*), the meat is eaten with rice, added to noodles, and stuffed into steamed and baked buns. Malaysian Hakka (a Chinese ethnic group) are renowned for succulent, long-cooked pork dishes like *khaw yoke*, sliced belly seasoned with five spice, layered with sliced taro and steamed.

Chicken (*ayam*) is tremendously popular in Malaysia and Singapore, but more of a special occasion meat in Brunei (as is beef or buffalo). Malay eateries offer a variety of chicken curries, and the meat regularly turns up on skewers, grilled and served with peanut sauce for satay. Another oft-enjoyed fowl is *itik* (duck), roasted and served over rice, simmered in star anise-scented broth and eaten with yellow *mee*, or stewed with aromatics for a spicy Indian Muslim curry.

Tough local beef (*daging*) is best cooked long and slowly, for dishes like coconut milk-based *rendang*. Chinese-style beef noodles feature tender chunks of beef and springy meatballs in a rich, mildly spiced broth lightened with pickled mustard. Indian Muslims do amazing things with mutton; it’s worth searching out *sup kambing*, stewed mutton riblets (and other parts, if you wish) in a thick soup, flavoured with loads of aromatics and chillies that’s eaten with sliced white bread.

The word *laksa* is thought to derive from the Persian word for noodle, *lakhsa* (slippery). The *Oxford Companion to Food* speculates that pasta was introduced to Indonesia (from where it migrated to Malaysia) by Arab traders or Indian Muslims in the 13th century.

*Geragau*, the tiny prawn found in the seas off the Strait of Melaka and the waters around Penang, are used to make *belacan* and *cincajuk*, extremely salty fermented pastes.

## CHOP TO IT!

Dine at enough *kopi tiam* (coffee shops) and you’re bound to run into lamb chops and mushroom soup. Though these may seem out of place on a menu that also features *belacan* (fermented prawn paste), fried rice and fish in sour curry, these dishes are as much a part of the Malaysian culinary universe as *laksa lemak* (curry laksa). Western classics like chops (pork and chicken, in addition to lamb) and fish and chips are Malaysia’s intergenerational comfort foods. They were introduced by the British but popularised in the early decades of the 20th century by the Hainanese immigrants who served as their private cooks – and later became known throughout the country for their prowess in the kitchen. The best versions, found in old-time *kopi tiam* sporting original floor tiles and peeling paint, are astoundingly authentic. Seek them out when a break from local fare is in order, and eat a bit of history.



Practising Muslims can relax in Malaysia, which is a world leader in offering halal food; even fast food outlets sport halal certification. Look for window stickers and on menus to check an outlet's accreditation.

Lengthy coastlines and abundant rivers and estuaries mean that seafood forms much of the diet for many of the region's residents. The region's wet markets devote whole sections to dried seafood, with some stalls specialising in *ikan bilis* – tiny dried anchovies that are deep-fried till crispy and incorporated into sambal or sprinkled atop noodle and rice dishes – and others displaying an array of salted dried fish.

## Vegetables

Vegetable lovers will have a field day. Every rice-based Malay meal includes *ulam*, a selection of fresh and blanched vegetables – wing beans, cucumbers, okra, eggplant and the fresh legume *petai* (or stink bean, so-named for its strong garlicky taste) – and fresh herbs to eat on their own or dip into *sambal*. Indians cook cauliflower and leafy vegetables like cabbage, spinach and roselle (sturdy leaves with an appealing sourness) with coconut milk and turmeric. Other greens – *daun ubi* (sweet potato leaves), *kangkong* (water spinach), Chinese broccoli and yellow-flowered mustard – are stir-fried with *sambal belacan* or garlic. The humble jicama is particularly versatile; it's sliced and added raw to *rojak*; grated, steamed, and rolled into *popiah* (soft spring rolls) and mashed, formed into a cake and topped with deep-fried shallots and chillies for Chinese *oh kuih*. Sweet corn is plentiful, sold by vendors grilled or off-the-cob and steamed, at almost every night market.

*Tahu* (soy beans) are consumed in many forms. Soy-milk lovers can indulge in the freshest of the fresh at Chinese wet markets, where a vendor selling deep-fried *crullers* (long fried-doughnut sticks) for dipping is never far away. *Dou fu* (soft fresh bean curd), eaten plain or doused with syrup, makes a great light snack. *Yong tauhu* is a healthy Hakka favourite of firm bean curd and vegetables like okra and eggplant stuffed with ground fish paste and served with chilli sauce. *Fucuk*, which is the chewy skin that forms on the surface of boiling soy milk, is fried golden or eaten fresh in noodle dishes, and absorbent deep-fried *tauhu pok* (bean curd 'puffs') are added to noodles and stews. Malays often cook with *tempeh*, a fermented soy bean cake with a nutty flavour, stir-frying it with *kecap manis*, lemongrass and chillies, and stewing it with vegetables in mild coconut gravy.

## Sweets

The locals are passionate about sweets; vendors of cakes and pastries lie in wait on street corners, footpaths and in markets. Many *kuih* incorporate coconut, grated or in the form of milk, and palm sugar; among the tastiest are *ketayap*, rice flour 'pancakes' rolled around a mix of the two, and *putu piring* (steamed rice flour 'flapjacks' filled with palm sugar and topped with coconut). Some *kuih* – *pulut panggang* (banana leaf-wrapped and grilled glutinous rice-and-coconut tubes filled with grated coconut, chopped dried chillies and dried shrimp), for example – combine sweet and savoury flavours to fantastic effect.

*Tong sui* (the Chinese name for 'sweet soups'), like sweet potato and sago pearls in a coconut milk-based broth, are reviving snacks. Perhaps the region's most beloved dessert is *cendol*, a heat-beating mound of shaved ice and chewy mung-bean-flour 'pasta' doused with fresh coconut milk and palm sugar syrup. ABC (for *ais batu campur* or 'mixed ice'), its more flamboyant cousin, is a hillock of shaved ice garnished with fluorescent-coloured (and mostly artificial-tasting) syrups, jellies, red beans, palm seeds and sweet corn. Don't leave the region without investigating the colourful sub-continental *mithai* (sweets) stacked in

When is a fruit not a fruit? When it's a young jackfruit (*nangka muda*), which Malay cooks treat as a vegetable, stirring it into coconut milk-based curries.

## FRUIT FOR THOUGHT

Those who have overindulged in *kuih* might repent with a dose of healthy tropical fruits. *Nenas* (pineapple), watermelon, *jambu* (rose apple), papaya and green guava are year-round choices, with more unusual fruits available seasonally. The dull brown skin of the *ciku* (sopadilla) hides supersweet flesh that tastes a bit like a date. Strip away the yellowish peel of the *duku* (also known as *dokong* and *langsats*) to find segmented, perfumed pearly flesh with a lychee-like flavour.

April and May are mango months, and come December to January and June to July, follow your nose to sample notoriously odoriferous love-it-or-hate-it durian. Should the king of fruits prove too repellent, consider the slightly smelly but wonderfully sweet yellow flesh of the young *nanika* (jackfruit).

Other tropical fruits you may come across at markets and street stalls:

- » **Buah nana** The custard apple; a knobby green skin conceals hard, black seeds and sweet, gloopy flesh with a granular texture.
- » **Buah salak** Known as the snakeskin fruit because of its scaly skin; the exterior looks like a mutant strawberry and the soft flesh tastes like unripe bananas.
- » **Cempedak** The Malaysian breadfruit; a huge green fruit with skin like the Thing from the *Fantastic Four*; the seeds and flesh are often curried or fried.
- » **Dragon fruit** An alien-looking red pod with tongue-like flanges hiding fragrant, kiwi fruit-like flesh with lots of tiny edible seeds.
- » **Guava** A green, apple-like ball containing sweet pink or white flesh.
- » **Jambu merah** Rose apple; elongated pink or red fruit with a smooth, shiny skin and pale, watery flesh; a good thirst quencher on a hot day.
- » **Longan** A tiny, hard ball like a mini lychee with sweet, perfumed flesh; peel it, eat the flesh and spit out the hard seeds.
- » **Mangosteen** A hard, purple shell conceals delightfully fragrant white segments, some containing a tough seed that you can spit out or swallow.
- » **Pomelo** Like a grapefruit on steroids, with a thick pithy green skin hiding sweet, tangy segments; cut into the skin, peel off the pith then break open the segments and munch on the flesh inside.
- » **Rambutan** People have different theories about what rambutans look like, not all repeatable in polite company; the hairy shell contains sweet, translucent flesh, which you scrape off the seed with your teeth.
- » **Soursop** A sack-like fruit with tasty but tart granular flesh and hard, black seeds; it's only ripe when soft and it goes off within days so eat it quickly.
- » **Starfruit** The star-shaped cross-section is the giveaway; the yellow flesh is sweet and tangy and believed by many to lower blood pressure.
- » **Tamarind** Fresh tamarind comes in a curved, brown pod; the hard seeds are hidden inside the delicious, tart flesh.

Little India shop windows; our favourite is creamy, buttery – and, yes, tooth-achingly sweet – milk halva.

## Drinks

Half the fun of taking breakfast in one of Singapore's or Malaysia's Little Indias is watching the tea *wallah* toss-pour an order of *teh tarik* ('pulled' tea) from one cup to the other. Locals love their leaves; tea is also brewed with ginger for *teh halia*, drunk hot or iced, with or without milk (*teh ais* or *teh-o ais*), and soured with lime juice (*teh limau*). For an especially rich cuppa head to an Indian cafe and ask for *teh susu kerabu*, hot tea with boiled fresh cow's milk. *Kopi* (coffee) is also extremely popular, and the inky, thick brew owes its distinctive colour and flavour to the fact that its beans are roasted with sugar. *Kopi* is served in Chinese coffee

shops (ask for *kopi-o* if you don't want sweetened condensed milk in yours, *kopi gao* if you want it especially strong, and *kopi bing* if you want it milky and iced) and is an excellent antidote to jet lag.

Caffeine-free alternatives include freshly squeezed or blended vegetable and fruit juices, sticky-sweet fresh sugar-cane juice (nice with a squeeze of calamansi), and *kelapa muda*, or young coconut water, drunk straight from the fruit with a straw. Other more-unusual drinks are *ee bee chui* (barley boiled with water, pandan leaf and rock sugar), *air mata kucing* (made with dried longan), and *cincau* or herbal grass jelly. Chinese salted plums add an oddly refreshing dimension to sweetened lime juice, in *asam boi*.

Thanks to sky-high duties, alcohol is pricey in Singapore and Malaysia (and banned or, more accurately, limited to hotels and high-end restaurants in Brunei); for a cheap, boozy night out stick to locally brewed beers like Tiger, Carlsberg and Guinness. Chinese stores stock a variety of less expensive and sometimes surprisingly palatable hard liquors.

## Habits & Customs

Fork and spoon are the cutlery of choice, except in Western-oriented establishments or *kopitiam* (coffee shops) serving chops and fish and chips, where you might get a knife, too. Don't put the fork in your mouth, but use it to gently nudge food onto your spoon. Chinese noodles and dishes served in Chinese restaurants are usually eaten with chopsticks (though forks and spoons are available on request). Malays and Indians eat rice-based meals with their right hand only, using thumb to manoeuvre rice onto the balls of the fingers and then into the mouth. (This is easier done if you moisten your rice with curries and side dishes and mash the lot together.) Wash your hands before and after with water from the teapot-like container on the table (Malay eateries) or at a communal sink at the side or rear of the room. Napkins are a rarity so it's always a good idea to carry a pack of tissues.

In some Chinese eateries you'll be given a basin of hot water containing saucers, chopsticks, bowls and cutlery. This is meant to allow for hygiene concerns; remove the items and dry them off or shake them dry.

Ever wondered why many durian stalls also sell mangosteens?

The latter is thought to be a 'cooling fruit' that, eaten on the heels of 'heaty' durian, brings the body back into balance.



# The Region's Environment

Malaysia's federal government maintains that it is doing its best to balance out the benefits of economic development with environmental protection and conservation. Others, including a long list of wildlife and environmental-protection agencies and pressure groups, beg to differ, pointing out how big business continues to have the ear of government when decision time rolls around.

It's far from a clear-cut situation: Malaysia's logging and oil palm businesses provide hundreds of thousands of jobs, yet they also wreak untold ecological damage and have caused the displacement of many tribal people and the consequent erosion of these unique cultures.

In Singapore strict laws control littering and waste emissions are policed vigilantly. Though little of the island's original wilderness is left, growing interest in ecology has seen bird sanctuaries and parkland areas created, with new parks in the Marina Bay development as well as a series of connectors that link up numerous existing parks and gardens around the island.

With few roads and much of its tiny area covered by forest, car emissions are the least of Brunei's problems. However, like much of the region, it suffers the effects of smoke haze from Indonesia.

## Deforestation

There's a disparity between government figures and those of environmental groups, but it's probable that more than 60% of Peninsular Malaysia's rainforests have been logged, with similar figures applying to Malaysian Borneo. Government initiatives like the National Forestry Policy have led to deforestation being cut to 900 sq km a year, a third slower than previously. The aim is to reduce the timber harvest by 10% each year, but even this isn't sufficient to calm the many critics who remain alarmed at the rate at which Malaysia's primary forests are disappearing.

At the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2008, Malaysia committed to maintaining 50% of its land with forest cover. However, as the Malaysian Nature Society and others have pointed out, the problem is how the government defines 'forest cover' – currently the description includes rubber plantations. In many states old-growth forests are being cut down to plant rubber.

Environmental groups like TREES (<http://trees.org.my>) have also been campaigning for the protection of the rainforests and water catchment areas along the eastern flank of Selangor. In 2010, 93,000 hectares of these uplands were gazetted as the Selangor State Park making it the peninsula's third largest protected area of forest after

### Online Resources

- » Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM; [www.foe-malaysia.org](http://www.foe-malaysia.org))
- » Orangutan Foundation ([www.orangutan.org.uk](http://www.orangutan.org.uk))
- » Wild Singapore ([www.wildsingapore.com](http://www.wildsingapore.com))
- » Malaysian Conversation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT; <http://malayan.tiger.net/v4>)

The Clouded Leopard Project (<http://cloudedleopard.org>) has funded several conservation efforts on Malaysian Borneo for this beautiful animal that may be rarer than the Malayan tiger.

There's an ongoing environmental threat in the region from 'haze' – smoke from fires set by Indonesian farmers and plantation companies to clear land for agricultural purposes. The haze is usually at its worst in Singapore and parts of Malaysia around March and just before September and October's rainy season.

Taman Negara and Royal Belum State Park. Find out more at <http://selangorstatepark.blogspot.com>.

In Sarawak and Sabah several national parks and reserves have recently been created or extended, like the Maliau Basin Conservation Area and the Pulong Tau National Park. However, the effects of logging are still clearly being felt in the region, which now suffers unusually long floods during the wet season.

The Heart of Borneo Project ([www.heartofborneo.org](http://www.heartofborneo.org)) is a hugely ambitious initiative led by WWF ([www.panda.org](http://www.panda.org)) to safeguard the island's biodiversity for future generations and ensure indigenous people's cultural survival by protecting 24,000 sq km of interconnected forest land in Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei and Kalimantan – altogether almost a third of Borneo.

Another ray of light comes from the Kuching-based Sarawak Biodiversity Centre ([www.sbc.org.my](http://www.sbc.org.my)), an organisation that aims to assist drug companies in their search for valuable medical compounds from the rainforest. If the cure for cancer or AIDS can be found in these forests, it might just be their partial saviour.

For more on what the government is doing in relation to forest management, see the websites of the forestry departments of Peninsular Malaysia ([www.forestry.gov.my](http://www.forestry.gov.my)), Sarawak ([www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my](http://www.forestry.sarawak.gov.my)) and Sabah ([www.forest.sabah.gov.my](http://www.forest.sabah.gov.my)). For the alternative point of view, read William W Bevis's award-winning *Borneo Log: The Struggle for Sarawak's Forests*, an evocative narrative that starkly outlines the environmental and human impacts of the logging in Sarawak.

## Improving Wildlife Conservation

At the end of 2010 Malaysia started to enforce its new Wildlife Conservation Act, which includes fines of up to RM100,000 and long prison sentences for poaching, smuggling of animals and other wildlife-related crimes. This first revision of such laws in over 30 years has been welcomed by local pressure groups including Traffic Southeast Asia ([www.traffic.org/southeast-asia](http://www.traffic.org/southeast-asia)) and the Malaysian Nature Society.

Smuggling of live animals and animal parts is a particular problem in the region. Pangolins, also known as scaly anteaters, are the most traded species even though they are protected under Malaysian law; their scales, believed to have medicinal properties, can fetch up to RM800 per kg. In July 2010 police looking for stolen cars also uncovered an illegal 'mini zoo' in a KL warehouse containing 20 species of protected wildlife, including a pair of rare birds of paradise worth RM1 million.

A month later, the notorious animal smuggler Alvin Wong was nabbed at Kuala Lumpur International Airport after his bag burst open revealing 95 boa constrictors, two rhinoceros vipers and a mata mata turtle. He was sentenced to five years in prison. Wong is described as 'the Pablo Escobar of wildlife trafficking' in Bryan Christy's *The Lizard King* (<http://thelizardkingbook.com>), a fascinating account of international animal and reptile smuggling.

## Palm Oil Plantations

The oil palm, a native of West Africa that was introduced into Malaysia in the 1870s, is probably now the most common tree in Malaysia. The country's first palm-oil plantation was established in 1917; today, according to the Malaysian Palm Oil Council ([www.mpoc.org.my](http://www.mpoc.org.my)), Malaysia is the world's leading producer of palm oil, accounting for over 40% of global production. The oil is extracted from the orange-coloured fruit,

which grows in bunches just below the fronds. It is used primarily for cooking, although it can also be refined into biodiesel – an alternative to fossil fuels.

For all the crops' benefits, there have been huge environmental consequences to the creation of vast plantations that have replaced the native jungle and previously logged forests; in 2003 Friends of the Earth reported that palm-oil production was responsible for 87% of deforestation in Malaysia. The use of polluting pesticides and fertilisers in palm-oil production also undermines the crop's eco credentials. Palm-oil plantations convert land into permanent monoculture, reducing the number of plant species by up to 90%. Oil palms require large quantities of herbicides and pesticides that can seep into rivers; drainage may lower water tables, drying out nearby peat forests (and releasing huge quantities of greenhouse gases in the process). Plantations also fragment the natural habitats that are especially important to large mammals.

The Palm Oil Action Group ([www.palmoilaction.org.au](http://www.palmoilaction.org.au)) is an Australian pressure group raising awareness about palm oil and the need to use alternatives. Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil tries to look at the issue from all sides while seeking to develop and implement global standards. Proforest ([www.proforest.net](http://www.proforest.net)) has also been working with Wild Asia ([www.wildasia.org](http://www.wildasia.org)) on the Stepwise Support Programme, designed to promote sustainability within the palm-oil industry.

## Hydroelectric Dams

Hydroelectric dams are touted as sources of carbon-free energy, but these huge projects often have serious environmental impacts. In addition, indigenous people are often forcibly relocated to areas where they have a difficulty earning a living or maintaining their traditions. Such was the case with the controversial Bakun Dam ([www.bakundam.com](http://www.bakundam.com)) in Sarawak.

In October 2010 the 207m high structure began flooding a reservoir that will eventually submerge an area of once-virgin rainforest about the size of Singapore (690 sq km). According to the Malaysian government, 'the second-highest concrete-faced rockfill dam in the world' will produce 2400MW of 'emission-free clean energy,' giving a much needed boost to Sarawak's economy.

However, Malaysian and international watchdogs claim the whole project – including contracts to clear the site of biomass, which involves logging old-growth jungle – has been shot through with corrupt

### Environmental Reads

- » *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia: The Environment* (Sham Sani, ed.)
- » *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo* (Junaidi Payne, Charles M Francis & Karen Philipps)
- » *Wild Malaysia: The Wildlife & Scenery of Peninsular Malaysia* (Junaidi Payne & Gerald Cubitt)

For up-to-date news and information on environmental issues affecting Malaysian Borneo check out the website of Rengah Sarawak (Sarawak News; [www.rengah.c2o.org](http://www.rengah.c2o.org)).

## CUTTING CARBON EMISSIONS

At the 2009 climate change conference in Copenhagen, Prime Minister Najib pledged to slash Malaysia's carbon emissions by 40% by 2020. According to the International Energy Agency the country emitted 6.68 tonnes of carbon dioxide per capita in 2007 – more than twice the world's average – and the fourth highest amount in the region after Brunei, Taipei and Singapore. Compared to these three countries, Malaysia's emission per capita percentage change between 1990 and 2007 was the highest, growing by 143%.

To reach its stated goal the federal government has added green technology to the portfolio of the Ministry of Energy and Water and announced the launch of a national green technology policy. The details remain sketchy, however, and the overall aim sits awkwardly with the nation's poor record on public transport and the continuing expansion of local budget airlines like AirAsia.

Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands (REACH; [www.reach.org.my](http://www.reach.org.my)) has been working since 2001 to preserve, restore and maintain this region as an environmentally sustainable agricultural area and tourist resort within a permanent nature reserve.

dealings designed to benefit the business associates of local politicians. Transparency International ([www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)) has declared the dam a 'monument of corruption.'

Borneo does not need the power that the dam will produce; the original plan was to send 70% of the energy to Peninsular Malaysia along a 670km undersea cable. That part of the project has been shelved, however, leaving Sarawak with a huge over-capacity (when all turbines are operating, the dam will produce 2.5 times as many watts as Sarawak's current peak demand). Some of the slack may be taken up by a massive aluminium smelter being built near Mukah.

Despite this, a dozen more dams in highland Sarawak are in various stages of planning and execution, including the 944MW Murum Dam, located in a Penan area 60km upriver from Bakun.

## Rivers

There has been some success in both Penang and Melaka when it comes to cleaning up polluted waterways. The Sungai Pinang that flows through the heart of George Town was once so filthy that it had a Class V classification, meaning it was unable to sustain life and contact with the water was dangerous. The state's clean-up program resulted in the waterway's pollution rating dropping to Class III in 2010. By 2015 it's hoped that the river will be waste free.

According to the Malaysian Nature Society, the revival of the once sludgy Sungai Melaka flowing through Melaka is also a model of how a river can be cleaned. Starting in 2005 the city invested about RM100 million in the project, which also included building grassy areas and walking paths along the river banks. A catamaran designed to clean up oil slicks was employed to remove rubbish then compress it into a material that could be used to reinforce the banks. The next step was

## THE PLIGHT OF TASIK CHINI

Part of the Pahang river basin and with a catchment size of 45 sq km, Tasik Chini is Malaysia's sole Unesco Biosphere Reserve. As late as 10 years ago the lake was a major tourist draw for the lotus flowers that practically carpeted its surface. Today pollution of the lake (which is actually a freshwater swamp) has resulted in murky waters and the near extinction of the lotuses.

Problems began in the mid-1980s, when the state government began approving land development schemes around the lake, and got worse when the federal government built a weir at the end of Sungai Chini in 1995 to facilitate navigation of tourist boats, despite protests by the Orang Asli who live in six villages around Tasik Chini.

The weir raised the lake by at least 2m, submerging thousands of trees and many stands of rattan by the water's edge, as well endangering the survival of the lotus plants, which grow best in shallow water. The water, already spoiled by run-off from open-cut iron ore mines as close as 50m from the lake's edge, was further polluted by the methane and hydrogen sulphide the dead vegetation in the lake produced as it rotted.

In August 2012 Transparency International-Malaysia (TI-M) and environmental agencies including WWF-Malaysia and Malaysian Nature Society launched a Save Tasik Chini campaign. Citing a Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia report, TI-M claimed that Tasik Chini's eco-system is in a 'critical situation' and if nothing was done the lake would perish by 2030 – a view strongly refuted by Pahang's Chief Minister Adnan Yaakob. The *Star* reported that Orang Asli are furious at Adnan's denials of the problem, quoting local leaders who says they can no longer fish in the polluted lake or harvest roots and herbs from areas now off limits because of mining operations.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- » Tread lightly and buy locally, avoiding (and reporting) instances where you see parts of or products made from endangered species for sale. On Peninsular Malaysia there's a 24-hour Wildlife Crime Hotline (☎019-356 4194) you can call to report illegal activities.
- » Visit nature sites, hire local trekking guides and provide custom for ecotourism initiatives. By doing so you're putting cash in local pockets and casting a vote for the economic (as opposed to the purely ecological) value of sustainability and habitat conservation.
- » Sign up to be a voluntary forest monitor at Forest Watch ([www.timalaysia-forestwatch.org.my](http://www.timalaysia-forestwatch.org.my)), a project by Transparency International Malaysia.
- » Check out Wild Asia's website ([www.wildasia.org](http://www.wildasia.org)) to learn more about responsible tourism in the region.
- » Keep abreast of and support local campaigns by checking out the websites of organisations like WWF Malaysia ([www.wwfmalaysia.org](http://www.wwfmalaysia.org)) and the Malaysian Nature Society ([www.mns.org.my](http://www.mns.org.my)).

the beautification of the banks, followed by domestic wastewater and cesspool treatment; reservoirs were built to trap scum, oil and refuse.

The focus has now turned to KL and the Klang Valley. The literal translation of Kuala Lumpur is 'muddy estuary'; anyone gazing on any of the milk-coffee-coloured waterways that flow through the city would still find that name highly appropriate. Following moves in 2010 by the Selangor state government to clean up a 21km stretch of the Sungei Klang around Klang, the much larger River of Life program now focuses anti-pollution efforts on the river's upper reaches. The government has allocated RM3 billion for the task of raising the river water quality from the current Class III and Class IV (not suitable for body contact) to Class IIb (suitable for body contact and recreational usage) by 2020.

## Overdevelopment

On hillsides in Peninsular Malaysia, overdevelopment married to poor construction standards has caused several disastrous landslides, one of the most recent being in December 2008 in Bukit Antarabangsar, when four people died as 14 luxury homes tumbled down the slope. The collapse of a 12-storey building in Selangor in December 1993 killed 49 people. The government has toughened up construction codes, but development of such precariously sited facilities continues apace in the cooler highland areas within easy reach of KL, for example in the Cameron Highlands.

The marina being constructed in Tekong on Pulau Tioman has aggravated environmentalists who argue it will damage coral reefs in the area. It has already forced a few hotel operations to close and, as of recently, was an ugly construction site. The proposed second (offshore) airstrip at Pulau Tioman has also drawn fire for similar reasons, although it appears this project may have been postponed.

Some 75% of Kelantan's coast is also under attack from erosion; in the worst cases the shoreline is retreating by up to 10m a year.

## Green, Clean Singapore

Singapore's reputation as an efficiently run, squeaky clean place is well justified. Visitors will no doubt notice the absence of trash on the streets: this is a result of a vast network of street cleaners and garbage

Ian Buchanan spent eight years creating the exquisite illustrations and text for *Fatimah's Kampung* (<http://en.cap.org.my>), a parable about how Malaysia is in the process of sacrificing nature and traditional values for economic development.



collection trucks. At the Housing Development Board flat complexes that the vast majority of Singaporeans live in there are seven types of formal and informal recycling schemes.

Waste is shipped off to Pulau Semakau, an island 8km south of the mainland. This landfill was planned and built by the National Environment Agency in 1999 and has been projected to meet the country's waste needs till 2040. More interestingly, the island itself has been much promoted by the government as an 'eco' hotspot (there isn't a stench, as waste buried has been processed or incinerated prior). Rehabilitated mangrove swamps sit next to a coral nursery. In 2005, the island was also opened for recreation activities such as nature walks and fishing.



# Survival Guide

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# Directory A-Z

## Accommodation

Malaysia's accommodation possibilities range from rock-bottom flophouses to luxurious five-star resorts. Outside the peak holiday seasons (around major festivals such as Chinese New Year in January/February) big discounts are frequently available – it's always worth asking about special offers.

Budget listings in this guide (denoted with a '\$') are those offering a double room with attached bathroom or dorm bed for under RM100; midrange properties (\$\$) have double rooms with attached baths for RM100 to RM400; top-end places (\$\$\$) charge over RM400 including 10% service and 5% tax (expressed as ++).

Promotional rates can bring rooms at many top-end hotels into the midrange category. A 6% government tax applies to all hotel rooms (including at cheaper hotels where it is invariably included in the quoted rate) and almost all top-end hotels levy an additional 10% service charge. Credit cards are widely

accepted at midrange and top-end hotels; cash payment is expected at cheaper places.

Warning: bed bug infestations are common in Malaysia's hotels and are a particular problem at the budget end of the market.

## Camping

Many of Malaysia's national parks have official camping grounds and will permit camping in nondesignated sites once you are deep in the jungle. There are also many lonely stretches of beach that are ideal for camping. Likewise, it is possible to camp on uninhabited bays on many of Malaysia's islands. A two-season tent with mosquito netting is ideal. A summer-weight sleeping bag is OK, but the best choice is a lightweight bag-liner, since even the nights are warm.

## Homestays

Staying with a Malaysian family will give you a unique experience many times removed from the fast-paced and largely recognisable life of the cities and towns. It's worth enquiring with **Tourism Malaysia** ([www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my](http://www.tourismmalaysia.gov.my)) and each of the state tourism bodies about the homestay programs operating throughout the country in off-the-beaten-track *kampung* (villages).

## Hostels & Guesthouses

At beach resorts and in the main tourist cities you will find a variety of cheap hostels and guesthouses. Dormitory accommodation is usually available. Rooms may be spartan (with flimsy walls and sometimes no window) and have shared bathrooms, but this is the cheapest accommodation option around and a great place to meet fellow travellers. These places offer their customers lots of little extras to outdo the competition, such as free wi-fi, tea and coffee, bicycles and transport. You'll normally pay around RM10 to RM30 for a dorm bed or RM15 to RM70 for a hotel-style room with air-con.

## Hotels

Standard rooms at top-end hotels are often called 'superior' in the local parlance. Most hotels have slightly more expensive 'deluxe' or 'club' rooms, which tend to be larger, have a better view and include extras such as breakfast or free internet access. Many also have suites.

At the low end of the price scale are the traditional

## BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews by Lonely Planet authors, check out <http://hotels.lonelyplanet.com>. You'll find independent reviews, as well as recommendations on the best places to stay. Best of all, you can book online.

## PRACTICALITIES

Connect to the reliable electricity supply (220V to 240V, 50 cycles) with a UK-type three-square-pin plug.

Read English-language newspapers the *New Straits Times*, the *Star* and the *Malay Mail*. In Malaysian Borneo you'll also find the *Borneo Post*, the *New Sarawak Tribune* and the *New Sabah Times*.

Listen to Traxx FM ([www.traxxfm.net](http://www.traxxfm.net); 90.3FM), HITZ FM ([www.hitz.fm](http://www.hitz.fm); 92.9FM) and MIX FM ([www.mix.fm](http://www.mix.fm); 94.5FM) for pop music and BFM ([www.bfm.my](http://www.bfm.my); 89.9FM) or Fly FM ([www.flyfm.com.my](http://www.flyfm.com.my); 95.8FM) for news (these frequencies are for the KL area). In Sabah, listen to Traxx FM (90.7FM) or Muzik FM (88.9FM); in Sarawak tune in to Traxx FM (89.9FM), or Wai FM (101.3FM) for tribal music.

Watch Malaysia's two government TV channels (TV1 and TV2), four commercial stations (TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9) as well as a host of satellite channels.

Use the metric system for weights and measures.

Chinese-run hotels usually offering little more than simple rooms with a bed, a table and chair, and a sink. The showers and toilets (which will sometimes be Asian squat-style) may be down the corridor. Note couples can sometimes economise by asking for a single, since in Chinese-hotel language 'single' means one double bed, and 'double' means two beds. Don't think of this as being tight; in Chinese hotels you can pack as many into one room as you wish.

The main catch with these hotels is that they can sometimes be terribly noisy. They're often on main streets, and the cheapest ones often have flimsy walls that stop short of the ceiling – great for ventilation but terrible for acoustics and privacy.

### Longhouses

A distinctive feature of indigenous Dayak life in Malaysian Borneo is the longhouse – essentially an entire village under one seemingly interminable roof. Contemporary longhouses fuse age-old forms with highly functional features such as corrugated iron roofs and satellite dishes.

According to longstanding Dayak tradition, anyone who shows up at a longhouse must be welcomed and given accommodation. However, these days turning up at a longhouse unannounced may be an unwelcome imposition on the residents – in short, bad manners. The way to avoid these pitfalls is to hire a locally-savvy guide or tour company that can co-ordinate your visit and make introductions.

### Resthouses

A few of the old British-developed resthouses, set up during the colonial era to provide accommodation for travelling officials, are still operating. Many are still government owned but are privately operated. Some have been turned into modern midrange resorts, others retain old colonial decor. The average price for a room in a resthouse is between RM70 and RM100, and this usually includes air-con and attached bathroom.

## Business Hours

Reviews won't list operating hours unless they deviate from the following:

- » **Banks** 10am to 3pm  
Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 11.30am Saturday
- » **Restaurants** noon to 2.30pm and 6pm to 10.30pm
- » **Shops** 9.30am to 7pm,  
malls 10am to 10pm

## Children

### Practicalities

Travelling with the kids in Malaysia is generally a breeze. For the most part, parents needn't be overly concerned, but it pays to lay down a few ground rules – such as regular hand-washing – to head off potential problems. Children should especially be warned not to play with animals, as rabies occurs in Malaysia.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* contains useful advice on how to cope with kids on the road and what to bring along to make things go more smoothly, with special attention paid to travelling in developing countries. Also useful for general advice is [www.travelwithyourkids.com](http://www.travelwithyourkids.com).

There are discounts for children for most attractions and for most transport. Many beach resorts have special family chalets. Cots, however, are not widely available in cheaper accommodation. Public transport is comfortable and relatively well organised. Pushing a stroller around isn't likely to be easy given there are often no footpaths and kerbs are high.

Baby formula, baby food and nappies (diapers) are widely available. However, it makes sense to stock up on these items before heading to remote destinations or islands.

### Sights & Activities

Some beach destinations suitable for families with younger children include Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Kapas and Tunku Abdul Rahman National Park. Those with older children might enjoy some of the jungle parks of

the country, including Taman Negara and, over in Sarawak, the Bako and Gunung Mulu national parks. For more animal encounters also consider the Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre in Sabah.

There are several ways to entertain the kids in Kuala Lumpur.

## Climate

Lying just 2° to 7° north of the equator, Peninsular Malaysia is hot and steamy year-round, with temperatures rarely dropping below 20°C, even at night.

Although Malaysia is monsoonal, only the east coast of the peninsula has a real rainy season – elsewhere there is just a little more rain than usual. Rain tends to arrive in brief torrential downpours, providing a welcome relief from the heat. During the monsoon it may rain every day, but it rarely rains all day. Humidity tends to hover around the 90% mark; escape the clammy heat by retreating to the cooler hills.

For current weather forecasts check the website of the **Malaysian Meteorological Department** ([www.kjc.gov.my/english/weather/weather.html](http://www.kjc.gov.my/english/weather/weather.html)).

## Customs Regulations

The following can be brought into Malaysia duty free:

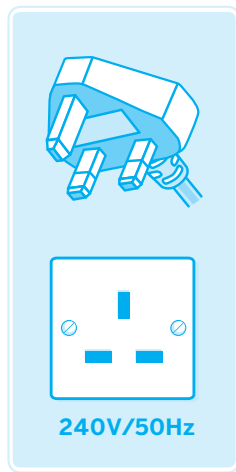
- » 1L of alcohol
- » 225g of tobacco (200 cigarettes or 50 cigars)
- » souvenirs and gifts not exceeding RM200 (RM500 when coming from Labuan or Langkawi).

Cameras, portable radios, perfume, cosmetics and watches and gifts not incur duty. Prohibited items include weapons (including imitations), fireworks and 'obscene and prejudicial articles' (pornography, for

example, and items that may be considered inflammatory, or religiously offensive) and drugs. Drug smuggling carries the death penalty in Malaysia.

Visitors can carry only RM1000 in and out of Malaysia; there's no limit on foreign currency.

## Electricity



## Embassies & Consulates

For a full list of Malaysian embassies and consulates outside the country check out [www.kln.gov.my](http://www.kln.gov.my). The following foreign embassies are in Kuala Lumpur and are generally open 8am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 4.30pm Monday to Friday:

**Australia** (☎03-2146 5555; [www.malaysia.embassy.gov.au](http://www.malaysia.embassy.gov.au); 6 Jln Yap Kwan Seng)

**Brunei** (☎03-2161 2800; [www.mofat.gov.bn](http://www.mofat.gov.bn); 19-01, 19th fl, Menara Tan & Tan, Jln Tun Razak)

**Canada** (☎03-2718 3333; [www.canadainternational.gc.ca/malaysia-malaisie](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/malaysia-malaisie); 17th fl, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

## TRAVEL ADVISORIES

For the latest travel advisories check the following websites:

**Australia** ([www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au))

**Canada** ([www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca))

**New Zealand** ([www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz))

**UK** ([www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad))

» **USA** ([www.travel.state.gov/travel](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel))

**France** (☎03-2053 5500; [www.ambafrance-my.org](http://www.ambafrance-my.org); 196 Jln Ampang)

**Germany** (☎03-2170 9666; [www.kuala-lumpur.diplo.de](http://www.kuala-lumpur.diplo.de); 26th fl, Menara Tan & Tan, 207 Jln Tun Razak)

**Ireland** (☎03-2161 2963; [www.embassyofireland.my](http://www.embassyofireland.my); 218 Jln Ampang)

**Netherlands** (☎03-2168 6200; [www.netherlands.org.my](http://www.netherlands.org.my); 7th fl, South Block, The Amp Walk, 218 Jln Ampang)

**New Zealand** (☎03-2078 2533; [www.nzembassy.com/malaysia](http://www.nzembassy.com/malaysia); Level 21, Menara IMC, 8 Jln Sultan Ismail)

**Singapore** (☎03-2161 6277; [www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/kuala\\_lumpur.html](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/kuala_lumpur.html); 209 Jln Tun Razak)

**UK** (☎03-2170 2200; <http://ukinmalaysia.fco.gov.uk>; 185 Jln Ampang)

**USA** (☎03-2168 5000; <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov>; 376 Jln Tun Razak)

## Food

The following price ranges refer to a two-course meal including a soft drink.

- » \$ less than RM10
- » \$\$ RM10-50
- » \$\$\$ more than RM50

## Gay & Lesbian Travellers

Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country and the level of tolerance for homosexuality is vastly different from its neighbours. It's illegal for men of any age to have sex with other men. In addition, the Islamic *syariah* laws (which apply only to Muslims) forbid sodomy and cross-dressing. Fortunately, outright persecution of gays and lesbians is rare.

Nonetheless, gay and lesbian travellers should avoid behaviour that attracts unwanted attention. Malaysians are conservative about displays of public affection. Although same-sex hand-holding is quite common for men and women, this is rarely an indication of sexuality; an overtly gay couple doing the same would attract attention, though there is little risk of vocal or aggressive homophobia.

There's actually a fairly active gay scene in KL. The lesbian scene is more discreet, but it exists for those willing to seek it out. Start looking for information on [www.utopia-asia.com](http://www.utopia-asia.com) or [www.fridae.com](http://www.fridae.com), both of which provide good coverage of gay and lesbian events and activities across Asia.

The **PT Foundation** ([www.ptfmalaysia.org](http://www.ptfmalaysia.org)) is a voluntary nonprofit organisation providing sexuality and HIV/AIDS education, care and support programs for marginalised communities.

## Insurance

It's always a good idea to take out travel insurance. Check the small print to see if the policy covers potentially dangerous sporting activities such as caving, diving or trekking, and make sure that it adequately covers your valuables. Health-wise, you may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals

directly rather than your having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure that you keep all documentation. Check that the policy covers ambulances, an emergency flight home and, if you plan trekking in remote areas, a helicopter evacuation.

A few credit cards offer limited, sometimes full, travel insurance to the holder.

## Internet Access

You'll have to be deep in the jungle to be off-line in Malaysia. Urban centres have ubiquitous hot spots for wi-fi connections (often free) and internet cafes typically charging RM3 per hour for broadband access. You can also use a smartphone to access the internet via wi-fi. In the remote reaches of the peninsula and Malaysian Borneo don't expect the internet to be fast, though.

Among the internet providers in Malaysia are **Jaring** ([www.jaring.my](http://www.jaring.my)) and **Telekom Malaysia** ([www.tm.com.my](http://www.tm.com.my)).

## Legal Matters

In any dealings with the local police it will pay to be deferential. You're most likely to come into contact with them either through reporting a crime (some of the big cities in Malaysia have tourist police stations for this purpose) or while driving. Minor misdemeanours may be overlooked, but don't count on it.

Drug trafficking carries a mandatory death penalty. A number of foreigners have been executed in Malaysia, some of them for possession of amazingly small quantities of heroin. Even possession of tiny amounts can bring down a lengthy jail sentence and a beating with the *rotan* (cane). Just don't do it.

## Maps

**Periplus** ([peripluspublishing.com](http://peripluspublishing.com)) has maps covering Malaysia, Peninsular Malaysia and KL. Tourism Malaysia's free *Map of Malaysia* has useful distance charts, facts about the country and inset maps of many major cities.

For accurate maps of rural areas contact the **National Survey & Mapping Department** (Ibu Pejabat Ukur & Pemetaan Malaysia; ☎03-2617 0800; [www.jupem.gov.my](http://www.jupem.gov.my); Jln Semarak, Kuala Lumpur; ☉7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri).

## Money

### ATMs & Credit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are the most widely accepted brands of credit card. You can make ATM withdrawals with your PIN, or banks such as Maybank (Malaysia's biggest bank), HSBC and Standard Chartered will accept credit cards for over-the-counter cash advances. Many banks are also linked to international banking networks such as Cirrus (the most common), Maestro and Plus, allowing withdrawals from overseas savings or cheque accounts.

If you have any questions about whether your cards will be accepted in Malaysia, ask your home bank about its reciprocal relationships with Malaysian banks.

Contact details for credit card companies in Malaysia: **American Express** (☎2050 0000; [www.americanexpress.com/malaysia](http://www.americanexpress.com/malaysia))

**Diners Card** (☎2161 1055; [www.diners.com.my](http://www.diners.com.my))

**MasterCard** (☎1800 804 594; [www.mastercard.com/sea](http://www.mastercard.com/sea))

**Visa** (☎1800 802 997; [www.visa-asia.com](http://www.visa-asia.com))

### Currency

The ringgit (RM) is made up of 100 sen. Coins in use are

1 sen, 5 sen, 10 sen, 20 sen, 50 sen; notes come in RM1, RM2 (rare), RM5, RM10, RM20, RM50 and RM100.

Malaysians sometimes refer to ringgit as 'dollars'; the old name used for the country's currency – if in doubt ask if people mean US dollars or 'Malaysian dollars' (ie ringgit).

Be sure to carry plenty of small bills with you when venturing outside cities – in some cases people cannot change bills larger than RM10.

## Taxes & Refunds

There is no general sales tax but there is a government tax of 6% at some midrange and all top-end hotels and many larger restaurants (in addition to an establishment's 10% service fee).

## Travellers Cheques & Cash

Banks in the region are efficient and there are plenty of moneychangers. For changing cash or travellers cheques, banks usually charge a commission (around RM10 per transaction, with a possible small fee per cheque), whereas moneychangers have no charges but their rates vary more. Compared with a bank, you'll generally get a better rate for cash at a moneychanger – it's usually quicker too. Away from the tourist centres, moneychangers' rates are often poorer and they may not change travellers cheques.

All major brands of travellers cheques are accepted across the region. Cash in major currencies is also readily exchanged, though like everywhere else in the world the US dollar has a slight edge.

## Photography

Malaysians usually have no antipathy to being photographed, although of course it's polite to ask permission

before photographing people and taking pictures in mosques or temples. For advice on taking better photos, Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures* is written by travel photographer Richard I'Anson.

Burning digital photos to a disk can easily be arranged at photo development shops across the country; it will cost around RM10 per disk. In bigger cities like KL, you'll find photo shops with a decent range of equipment at reasonable prices.

## Post

### Pos Malaysia Berhad

(☎1300 300 300; [www.pos.com.my](http://www.pos.com.my)) runs an efficient postal system. Post offices are open 8am to 5pm from Monday to Saturday, but closed on the first Saturday of the month and public holidays.

Aerograms and postcards cost 50 sen to send to any destination. Letters weighing 20g or less cost 90 sen to Asia, RM1.40 to Australia or New Zealand, RM1.50 to the UK and Europe, and RM1.80 to North America. Parcel rates range around RM20 to RM60 for a 1kg parcel, depending on the destination.

Main post offices in larger cities sell packaging materials and stationery.

## Public Holidays

As well as fixed secular holidays, various religious festivals (which change dates annually) are national holidays. These include Chinese New Year (in January/February), the Hindu festival of Deepavali (in October/November), the Buddhist festival of Wesak (April/May) and the Muslim festivals of Hari Raya Haji, Hari Raya Puasa, Mawlid al-Nabi and Awal Muharram (Muslim New Year); see p22 for dates.

Fixed annual holidays include the following:

- » **New Year's Day** 1 January
- » **Federal Territory Day** 1 February (in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya only)
- » **Good Friday** March or April (in Sarawak & Sabah only)
- » **Labour Day** 1 May
- » **Yang di-Pertuan Agong's (King's) Birthday** 1st Saturday in June
- » **Governor of Penang's Birthday** 2nd Saturday in July (in Penang only)
- » **National Day** (Hari Kebangsaan) 31 August
- » **Malaysia Day** 16 September
- » **Christmas Day** 25 December

## School Holidays

Schools break for holidays five times a year. The actual dates vary from state to state but are generally in January (one week), March (two weeks), May (three weeks), August (one week) and October (four weeks).

## Safe Travel

Operators mentioned in this book have been personally checked by the authors and should be reliable. However, you should always check terms and conditions carefully.

## Animal Hazards

Rabies occurs in Malaysia, so any bite from an animal should be treated very seriously. In the jungles and mangrove forests, living hazards include leeches (annoying but harmless), snakes (some kinds are highly venomous), macaques (prone to bag-snatching in some locales), orang-utans (occasionally aggressive) and, in muddy estuaries, saltwater crocodiles (deadly if they drag you under).

## Theft & Violence

Theft and violence are not particularly common in Malaysia and compared with Indonesia or Thailand it's extremely safe. Nevertheless, it pays to keep a close eye on your belongings, especially your travel documents (passport, travellers cheques etc), which should be kept with you at all times.

Muggings do happen, particularly in KL and Penang, and physical attacks have been known to occur, particularly after hours and in the poorer, run-down areas of cities. We've been told that thieves on motorbikes particularly target women for grab raids on their handbags. Also keep a watch out for sleazy local 'beach boys' in Langkawi and the Perhentians.

Credit-card fraud is a growing problem in Malaysia. Use your cards only at established businesses and guard your credit-card numbers closely.

A small, sturdy padlock is well worth carrying, especially if you are going to be staying at any of the cheap chalets found on Malaysia's beaches, where flimsy padlocks are the norm.

## Telephone

Landline services are provided by the national monopoly **Telekom Malaysia** (TM; [www.tm.com.my](http://www.tm.com.my)).

### Fax

Fax facilities are available at TM offices in larger cities and at some main post offices. If you can't find one of these try a travel agency or large hotel.

## International Calls

The easiest and cheapest way to make international calls is to buy a local SIM card for your mobile (cell) phone. Only certain payphones permit international calls. You can make operator-assisted international calls from local TM offices. To

save money on landline calls, buy a prepaid international calling card (available from convenience stores).

## Local Calls

Local calls cost 10 sen for three minutes. Payphones take coins or prepaid cards which are available from TM offices and convenience stores. Some also take international credit cards. You'll also find a range of discount calling cards at convenience stores and mobile-phone counters.

## Mobile (Cell) Phones

If you have arranged global roaming with your home provider, your GSM digital phone will automatically tune into one of the region's digital networks. If not, cheap prepaid SIM cards (RM8.50; passport required) are available almost everywhere from mobile-phone shops and kiosks (including at airports). If you bring along your own phone, make sure it can handle 900/1800MHz and is not locked. In Borneo, the cheapest mobile phones start at about US\$40.

Local calls cost RM0.12 to RM0.15 per minute; international direct dialling costs just RM0.18 per minute to North America and to landline numbers in Australia and the UK (mobile lines cost RM0.88 per minute). SMSs (text messages; RM0.06 or less each) are hugely popular and are a great way to communicate with locals and expats.

There are three mobile-phone companies, all with similar call rates and prepaid packages:

- » **Celcom** ([www.celcom.com.my](http://www.celcom.com.my); numbers beginning with 013 or 019) This is the best company to use if you'll be spending time in remote regions of Sabah & Sarawak.
- » **DiGi** ([www.digi.com.my](http://www.digi.com.my); numbers beginning with 016)
- » **Maxis** ([www.maxis.com.my](http://www.maxis.com.my); numbers beginning with 012 or 017).

## Time

Malaysia is eight hours ahead of GMT/UTC (London). Noon in Kuala Lumpur is:

- » 8pm in Los Angeles
- » 11pm in New York
- » 4am in London
- » 2pm in Sydney and Melbourne

## Toilets

Although there are still some places with Asian squat-style toilets, you'll most often find Western-style ones these days. At public facilities toilet paper is not usually provided. Instead, you will find a hose which you are supposed to use as a bidet or, in cheaper places, a bucket of water and a tap. If you're not comfortable with this, remember to take packets of tissues or toilet paper wherever you go.

## Tourist Information

Tourism Malaysia has an efficient network of overseas offices, which are useful for predeparture planning. Unfortunately, its domestic offices are less helpful and are often unable to give specific information about destinations and transport. Nonetheless, they do stock some decent brochures as well as the excellent *Map of Malaysia*.

Within Malaysia there are also a number of state tourist-promotion organisations, which often have more detailed information about specific areas. These include:

- » **Johor Tourism** ([www.johortourism.com.my](http://www.johortourism.com.my))
- » **Sabah Tourism** ([www.sabahtourism.com](http://www.sabahtourism.com))
- » **Pahang Tourism** ([www.pahangtourism.com.my](http://www.pahangtourism.com.my))
- » **Perak Tourism** ([www.peraktourism.com](http://www.peraktourism.com))
- » **Sarawak Tourism** ([www.sarawaktourism.com](http://www.sarawaktourism.com))



**Tourism Penang**

(www.tourismpenang.gov.my)

**Tourism Selangor**

(www.tourismselangor.org)

**Tourism Terengganu**

(http://tourism.terengganu.gov.my)

## Travellers with Disabilities

For the mobility impaired, Malaysia can be a nightmare. In most cities and towns there are often no footpaths, kerbs are very high, construction sites are everywhere, and crossings are few and far between. On the upside, taxis are cheap and both Malaysia Airlines and KTM (the national rail service) offer 50% discounts on travel for travellers with disabilities.

Before setting off get in touch with your national support organisation (preferably with the travel officer, if there is one). Also try:

» **Accessible Journeys**

(2800-846 4537; www.disabilitytravel.com) in the US.

» **Mobility International USA**

(2541-343 1284; www.miusa.org) in the US.

» **Nican** (202-6241 1220;

www.nican.com.au) in Australia

» **Tourism For All** (208-45

124 9971; www.tourismforall.org.uk) in the UK.

## Visas

Visitors must have a passport valid for at least six months beyond the date of entry into Malaysia. The following gives a brief overview of other requirements – full details of visa regulations are available on the website www.kln.gov.my.

Nationals of most countries are given a 30- or 60-day visa on arrival, depending on the expected length of stay. As a general rule, if you arrive by air you will be given 60 days automatically, though coming overland you may be given 30 days

unless you specifically ask for a 60-day permit. It's possible to get an extension at an immigration office in Malaysia for a total stay of up to three months. This is a straightforward procedure that is easily done in major Malaysian cities.

Only under special circumstances can Israeli citizens enter Malaysia.

Both Sabah and Sarawak retain a certain degree of state-level control of their borders. Malaysian citizens from Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia) cannot work in Malaysian Borneo (East Malaysia) without special permits, and tourists must go through passport control and have their passports stamped whenever they:

» arrive in Sabah or Sarawak from Peninsular Malaysia or the federal district of Pulau Labuan

» exit Sabah or Sarawak on their way to Peninsular Malaysia or Pulau Labuan

» travel between Sabah and Sarawak.

When entering Sabah or Sarawak from another part of Malaysia, your new visa stamp will be valid only for the remainder of the period left on your original Malaysian visa. In Sarawak, an easy way to extend your visa is to make a 'visa run' to Brunei or Indonesia (through the Tebedu–Entikong land crossing).

## Volunteering

Opportunities include the following:

» **All Women's Action Society Malaysia** (www.awam.org.my)

Aims to improve the lives of women in Malaysia by lobbying for a just, democratic and equitable society with respect and equality for both genders.

» **Ecoteer** (www.ecoteerresponsibletravel.com)

**Eden Handicap Service Centre** (www.edenhandicap.org) Christian-run

organisation caring for the handicapped of Penang – volunteers are needed to help with a variety of activities.

» **Great Orangutan Project**

(www.orangutanproject.com)

Places paying volunteers at the Matang Wildlife Centre in Sarawak.

» **LASSie** (www.langkawilassie.org.my)

Dog and cat lovers can help out at the Langkawi Animal Shelter & Sanctuary Foundation, next to Bon Ton Resort.

» **Malaysian AIDS Council**

(www.mac.org.my) Seeks volunteers and interns to assist in their campaigning work.

» **Malaysian Nature Society**

(www.mns.org.my) Check their website or drop them a line to find out ways you can get involved in helping preserve Malaysia's natural environment.

» **Miso Walai Homestay Program**

(www.misowalahomestay.com) Gets travellers involved with local wetlands restoration projects.

» **Nur Salaam** (www.nursalam.bbnw.org)

This charity works with street kids in the Chow Kit area of KL.

» **PAWS** (www.paws.org.my)

Animal rescue shelter in Subang, about 30 minutes from central KL.

» **Real Gap** (www.realgap.co.uk)

Arranges trips that involve environmental project and community work in Sabah, or work as an assistant at Zoo Negara near KL.

» **Regional Environmental Awareness Cameron Highlands**

(Reach; www.reach.org.my) Take part in reforestation and recycling programs in the Cameron Highlands.

» **Sepilok Orang-Utan Rehabilitation Centre**

Has one of the best established volunteer programs for animal lovers.

» **Travellers Worldwide**

(www.travellersworldwide.com) Offers a range of programs including working on wildlife reserves, working with

disabled children, teaching English and scuba-diving work experience.

**Trekforce** ([www.trekforce.org.uk](http://www.trekforce.org.uk)) Offers a 10-week course working with the Kelabit people on community projects in Sarawak's Kelabit Highlands.

**Wild Asia** ([www.wildasia.org](http://www.wildasia.org)) A variety of volunteer options generally connected with the environment and sustainable tourism in the region.

**World Challenge** ([www.world-challenge.co.uk](http://www.world-challenge.co.uk)) Brings a lot of (mainly UK) volunteers to Malaysia for conservation and other projects.

**Zoo Negara** Help the zoo-keepers feed and care for their charges.

## Women Travellers

The key to travelling with minimum hassle in Malaysia is to blend in with the locals, which means dressing modestly and being respectful, especially in areas of stronger Muslim religious sensibilities such as the northeastern states of Peninsula Malaysia.

Regardless of what local non-Muslim women wear, it's better to be safe than sorry – we've had reports of attacks on women ranging from minor verbal aggravation to physical assault. Hard as it is to say, the truth is that women are much more likely to have problems in Malay-dominated areas, where attitudes are more conservative.

In Malay-dominated areas, you can halve your hassles just by tying a bandanna over your hair (a minimal concession to the headscarf worn by most Muslim women). When visiting mosques, cover your head and limbs with a headscarf and sarong (many mosques lend these out at the entrance). At the beach, most Malaysian women swim fully clothed in T-shirts and shorts, so don't even think about going topless.

Be proactive about your own safety. Treat overly friendly strangers, both male and female, with a good deal of caution. In cheap hotels check for small peepholes in the walls and doors; when you have a choice, stay in a Chinese-operated hotel. On

island resorts, stick to crowded beaches, and choose a chalet close to reception and other travellers. Take taxis after dark and avoid walking alone at night in quiet or seedy parts of town.

## Work

There are possibilities for those who seek them out, from professional-level jobs in finance, journalism and the oil industry to temporary jobs at some guesthouses and dive centres in popular resort areas. Those with teaching credentials can find English-teaching jobs in Malaysia, though pickings are slim compared to Japan and Korea. Teachers can check some of the many TEFL sites, including **Edu-find Jobs** ([www.jobs.edufind.com](http://www.jobs.edufind.com)).

Depending on the nature of your job, you'll need either an Expatriate Personnel Visa or a Temporary Employment Visa. For details and requirements, check the website of the **Immigration Department of Malaysia** ([www.imi.gov.my/index.php/ms](http://www.imi.gov.my/index.php/ms)).

# Transport

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Entering Malaysia

The main requirements are a passport that's valid for travel for at least six months, proof of an onward ticket and adequate funds for your stay, although you will rarely be asked to prove this.

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

### Air

#### Airports & Airlines

**Kuala Lumpur International Airport** (☎8777 8888; [www.klia.com.my](http://www.klia.com.my)), 75km south of Kuala Lumpur (KL), is the main gateway. Near KLIA, the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT), from which AirAsia currently operates, will be replaced in 2013 by a new terminal, KLIA2. These terminals handle the bulk of international flights, with the exception of a few flights from Asia and Australia, which come via Penang,

Kuching, Kota Kinabalu and a few other cities.

#### Airlines Flying To/From Malaysia

**AirAsia** (☎600 85 8888; [www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com))

**Batavia Air** (☎0804 1 222 888; [www.batavia-air.com](http://www.batavia-air.com))

**Berjaya Air** (☎03-2119 6616; [www.berjaya-air.com](http://www.berjaya-air.com))

**Cathay Pacific** ([www.cathay-pacific.com](http://www.cathay-pacific.com))

**Emirates** ([www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com))

**Eva Air** ([www.evaair.com](http://www.evaair.com))

**Firefly** (☎03-7845 4543; [www.fireflyz.com.my](http://www.fireflyz.com.my))

**Jetstar** ([www.jetstar.com](http://www.jetstar.com))

**Malaysia Airlines** (MAS; ☎1300-883 000, outside Malaysia 03-2161 0555; [www.malaysia-airlines.com.my](http://www.malaysia-airlines.com.my))

**Royal Brunei Airlines** ([www.bruneiair.com](http://www.bruneiair.com))

**Silk Air** ([www.silkair.com](http://www.silkair.com))

**Singapore Airlines** (☎2692 3122; [www.singaporeair.com](http://www.singaporeair.com))

**Tiger Airways** ([www.tigerairways.com](http://www.tigerairways.com))

#### Tickets

When shopping for a ticket, compare the cost of flying into Malaysia versus the cost of flying into Singapore. From Singapore you can travel

overland to almost any place in Peninsular Malaysia in less than a day, and Singapore also has direct flights to Malaysian Borneo and Brunei. KL and Singapore are also good places to buy tickets for onward travel.

### Land

See also Visas.

### Brunei

Border crossings are possible into Brunei from Sarawak.

### Indonesia

Several express buses run between Pontianak in Kalimantan and Kuching and Miri in Sarawak, and Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. The bus crosses at the Tebedu–Entikong border.

### Singapore

The Causeway linking Johor Bahru with Singapore handles most traffic between the countries. Trains and buses run from all over Malaysia straight through to Singapore terminating at Woodlands, or you can take a bus to JB and get a taxi or one of the frequent buses from JB to Singapore.

Trains linking Singapore and KL cost between S\$30/RM34 and S\$130/RM130 depending on what class of ticket you buy and whether you go for a berth or not. The journey takes about seven hours.

A good website with details of express buses between Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand is the **Express Bus Travel Guide** ([www.singaporemalaysiabus.com](http://www.singaporemalaysiabus.com)).

There is also a causeway linking Tuas, in western Singapore, with Geylang Patah in JB. This is known as the Second Link, and some bus services to Melaka and up the west coast head this way. If you have a car, tolls on the Second Link are much higher than those on the main Causeway.

## Thailand

### BUS & CAR

You can cross the border by road into Thailand at Padang Besar, Bukit Kayu Hitam, Rantau Panjang (Sungai Golok on the Thai side) and Pengkalan Kubor.

### TRAIN

The rail route into Thailand is on the Butterworth–Alor Setar–Hat Yai route, which crosses into Thailand at Padang Besar. You can take the International Express from Butterworth all the way to Bangkok. Trains from KL and Singapore are timed to connect with this service.

From Butterworth to Hat Yai the 2nd-class fare is upper/lower berth RM65/73, to Bangkok RM95/103, from Alor Setar to Hat Yai RM58.40/66.40 and to Bangkok RM88.40/96.40.

From Alor Setar there is an additional daily northbound train to Hat Yai (from RM12, three hours). And from KL there is one through service daily (the Senandung Langkawi) to Hat Yai (seat/upper berth/lower berth RM44/52/57).

From Hat Yai there are frequent train and bus connections to other parts of Thailand.

The opulent **Eastern & Oriental Express** ([www.orient-express.com](http://www.orient-express.com)) also connects Singapore and Bangkok making stops in KL and Butterworth (for Penang).

## Sea

### Brunei

Boats connect Brunei to Pulau Labuan, from where boats go to Sabah. All international boats depart from Muara, 25km northeast of Bandar Seri Begawan, where Brunei immigration formalities are also handled.

### Indonesia

The following are the main ferry routes between Indonesia and Malaysia:

- » Bengkalis (Sumatra) to Melaka
- » Pulau Batam to Johor Bahru
- » Dumai (Sumatra) to Melaka
- » Medan (Sumatra) to Penang
- » Pekanbaru (Sumatra) to Melaka
- » Tanjung Pinang Bintan to Johor Bahru
- » Tanjung Balai (Sumatra) to Pelabuhan Klang and Kukup
- » Tarakan (Kalimantan) to Tawau

## Philippines

Ferries link Sandakan with Zamboanga, on the Philippine island of Mindanao, twice a week.

## Singapore

Singapore has a number of regular ferry connections to Malaysia. Cruise trips in the region are also very popular with locals.

## Thailand

Ferries connect Kuah on Pulau Langkawi with Satun on the Thai coast and, from November to mid-May, with Ko Lipe; make sure you get your passport stamped going in either direction.

## GETTING AROUND

## Air

### Airlines in Malaysia

The two main domestic operators are **Malaysia Airlines** (MAS; ☎1300-883 000, outside Malaysia 03-2161 0555; [www.malaysia-airlines.com.my](http://www.malaysia-airlines.com.my)) and **AirAsia** (☎600 85 8888; [www.airasia.com](http://www.airasia.com)).

The MAS subsidiary **Firefly** (☎03-7845 4543; [www.fireflyz.com.my](http://www.fireflyz.com.my)) has flights from KL (SkyPark Subang Terminal) to Penang, Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu, Kerteh, Langkawi, Johor Bahru, Alor Setar and Kuantan, and

from Penang to KL, Johor Bahru and Langkawi.

**Berjaya Air** (☎03-7847 8228; [www.berjaya-air.com](http://www.berjaya-air.com)) flies between KL (SkyPark Subang Terminal), Pulau Tioman, Pulau Pangkor and Pulau Redang in Peninsular Malaysia, as well as Singapore and Koh Samui in Thailand.

In Malaysian Borneo, Malaysia Airlines' subsidiary **MASwings** ([www.maswings.com.my](http://www.maswings.com.my)) offers local flights within and between Sarawak and Sabah; it's main hub is Miri. These services, especially those handled by 18-seat Twin Otters, are very much reliant on the vagaries of the weather. In the wet season (October to March in Sarawak and on Sabah's northeast coast; May to November on Sabah's west coast), places like Bario in Sarawak can be isolated for days at a time, so don't venture into this area if you have a very tight schedule. These flights are completely booked during school holidays. At other times it's easier to get a seat at a few days' notice, but always book as far in advance as possible.

## Discounts

All the airlines offer discounts tickets on the internet, depending on how far in advance you book – in some cases you might only pay for the airport taxes. A variety of other discounts (typically between 25% and 50%) are available for flights around Malaysia on Malaysia Airlines, including for families and groups of three or more (it's worth inquiring when you book tickets in Malaysia). Student discounts are available, but only for students enrolled in institutions that are in Malaysia.

## Bicycle

Bicycle touring around Malaysia and neighbouring countries is an increasingly

popular activity. The main road system is well engineered and has good surfaces, but the secondary road system is limited. Road conditions are good enough for touring bikes in most places, but mountain bikes are recommended for forays off the beaten track.

Top-quality bicycles and components can be bought in major cities, but generally 10-speed (or higher) bikes and fittings are hard to find. Bringing your own is the best bet. Bicycles can be transported on most international flights; check with the airline about extra charges and shipment specifications.

Useful websites include:

» **KL Bike Hash** ([www.klmbh.org](http://www.klmbh.org)) Details of the monthly bike ride out of KL and links to other cycling-connected sites in Malaysia.

» **Bicycle Touring Malaysia** ([www.bicycletouringmalaysia.com](http://www.bicycletouringmalaysia.com)) A mine of information about cycling around the region, run by Dave, a local who also offers homestays at his home in the state of Perak.

» **Malaysia Cycling Events & Blogs** ([www.malaysiacycling.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.malaysiacycling.blogspot.co.uk)) Includes listings of cycle shops around the country.

» **MTB Asia** ([www.mtbasia.com](http://www.mtbasia.com)) A portal with links to several mountain-biking related sites covering Malaysia.

## Boat

There are no services connecting Peninsular Malaysia with Malaysian Borneo. On a local level, there are boats and ferries between the peninsula and offshore islands, and along the rivers of Sabah and Sarawak. Note that some ferry operators are notoriously lax about observing safety rules, and local authorities are often nonexistent. If a boat looks overloaded or otherwise unsafe, *do not board it* – no-one else will look out for your safety.

## Bus

Bus travel in Malaysia is economical and generally comfortable, and seats can be reserved. It's also fast – sometimes too fast. In a bid to pack in as many trips as possible, some bus drivers speed recklessly, resulting in frequent, often fatal, accidents.

**Konsortium Transnasional Berhad** ([www.ktb.com.my](http://www.ktb.com.my)) is Malaysia's largest bus operator running services under the **Transnasional** (☎1300-888 582; [www.transnasional.com.my](http://www.transnasional.com.my)), **Nice** (☎2272 1586; [www.nice-coaches.com.my](http://www.nice-coaches.com.my)), **Plusliner** ([www.plusliner.com](http://www.plusliner.com)) and **Cityliner** ([www.cityliner.com.my](http://www.cityliner.com.my)) brands. Its services tend to be slower than rivals, but its buses have also been involved in several major accidents. They have competition from a variety of privately operated buses on the longer domestic routes including **Aeroline** ([www.aeroline.com.my](http://www.aeroline.com.my)) and **Supernice** ([www.supernice.com.my](http://www.supernice.com.my)). There are so many buses on major runs that you can often turn up and get a seat on the next bus.

On main routes most private buses have air-con (often turned to frigid so bring a sweater!) and cost only a few ringgit more than regular buses.

In larger towns there may be a number of bus stations; local/regional buses often operate from one station and long-distance buses from another; in other cases, KL for example, bus stations are differentiated by the destinations they serve.

Bus travel off the beaten track is relatively straightforward. Small towns and *kampung* (villages) all over the country are serviced by public buses, usually nonair-conditioned rattlers. Unfortunately, they are often poorly signed and sometimes the only way for you to find your

bus is to ask a local. These buses are invariably dirt cheap and provide a great sample of rural life. In most towns there are no ticket offices, so buy your ticket from the conductor after you board.

## Car & Motorcycle

Driving in Malaysia is fantastic compared with most Asian countries. There has been a lot of investment in the country's roads, which are generally of a high quality. New cars for hire are commonly available and fuel is inexpensive (RM1.85 per litre).

It's not all good news, though. Driving in the cities, particularly KL, can be a nightmare, due to traffic and confusing one-way systems. Malaysian drivers aren't always the safest when it comes to obeying road rules – they mightn't be as reckless as those you might see elsewhere in Southeast Asia, but they still take risks. For example, hardly any of the drivers keep to the official 110km/h speed limit on the main highways and tailgating is a common problem.

The Lebuhraya (North–South Hwy) is a six-lane expressway that runs for 966km along the length of the peninsula from the Thai border in the north to JB in the south. There are quite steep toll charges for using the expressway and these vary according to the distance travelled. As a result the normal highways remain crowded while traffic on the expressway is light. Many other highways are in excellent condition and many are under construction.

## Bringing Your Own Vehicle

It's technically possible to bring your vehicle into Malaysia, but there are reams of red tape and the costs are prohibitively expensive – a hire car is a much better proposition.

## CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Every form of transport that relies on carbon-based fuel generates CO<sub>2</sub>, the main cause of human-induced climate change. Modern travel is dependent on aeroplanes, which might use less fuel per kilometre per person than most cars but travel much greater distances. The altitude at which aircraft emit gases (including CO<sub>2</sub>) and particles also contributes to their climate change impact. Many websites offer 'carbon calculators' that allow people to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey and, for those who wish to do so, to offset the impact of the greenhouse gases emitted with contributions to portfolios of climate-friendly initiatives throughout the world. Lonely Planet offsets the carbon footprint of all staff and author travel.

### Driving Licence

A valid overseas licence is needed to rent a car. An International Driving Permit (a translation of your state or national driver's license and its vehicle categories) is usually not required by local car-hire companies, but it is recommended that you bring one. Most rental companies also require that drivers are at least 23 years old (and less than 65) with at least one year of driving experience.

### Hire

Major rent-a-car operations include **Avis** ([www.avis.com.my](http://www.avis.com.my)), **Hertz** ([www.simedarbycarrental.com](http://www.simedarbycarrental.com)), **Mayflower** ([www.mayflowercarrental.com](http://www.mayflowercarrental.com)) and **Orix** ([www.orixcarrentals.com.my](http://www.orixcarrentals.com.my)); there are many others, though, including local operators only found in one city. Unlimited distance rates for a 1.3L Proton Saga, one of the cheapest and most popular cars in Malaysia, are posted at around RM190/1320 per day/week, including insurance and collision-damage waiver. The Proton is basically a Mitsubishi assembled under licence in Malaysia.

You can often get better prices, either through smaller local companies or when the major companies offer special deals. Rates drop substantially for longer rentals, and if you shop around by phone, you can get wheels for as little as RM2500 per month, including unlimited kilometres and insurance.

The advantage of dealing with a large company is that it has offices all over the country, giving better backup if something goes wrong and allowing you to pick up in one city and drop off in another (typically for a RM50 surcharge). Mayflower is one local company with offices all over and some competitive rates.

The best place to look for car hire is KL, though Penang is also good. In Sabah and Sarawak there is less competition and rates are higher, partly because of road conditions; there's also likely to be a surcharge if you drop your car off in a different city from the one you rented it in.

### Insurance

Rental companies will provide insurance when you hire a car, but always check what the extent of your coverage will be, particularly if you're involved in an accident. You might want to take out your own insurance or pay the rental company an extra premium for an insurance excess reduction.

### Road Rules

Driving in Malaysia broadly follows the same rules as in Britain and Australia – cars are right-hand drive, and you drive on the left side of the road. The only additional precaution you need to take is to be aware of possible road hazards: stray animals, wandering pedestrians and the large number of motorcyclists. The speed

limit is 110km per hour on expressways slowing down to 50km per hour on *kampung* (village) back roads, so take it easy.

Wearing safety belts is compulsory. Malaysia drivers show remarkable common sense compared to other countries in the region. However, there are still plenty of drivers who take dangerous risks. Lane-drift is a big problem and signalling, when used at all, is often unclear. Giving a quick blast of the horn when you're overtaking a slower vehicle is common practice and helps alert otherwise sleepy drivers to your presence.

### Hitching

Keep in mind hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travelers who decide to hitch, particularly single women, should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

This said, Malaysia has long had a reputation for being a great place for hitchhiking, and it's generally still true, though with inexpensive bus travel most travelers don't bother. Note that hitchhikers are banned from the Lebuhraya expressway.

## Local Transport

Local transport varies widely from place to place. Taxis are found in all large cities, and most have meters. Fares in KL and other cities on the peninsula are as follows: flagfall (first 2km) is RM3, with an additional 20 sen for each 200m or 45 seconds thereafter; 20 sen for each additional passenger over two passengers; RM1 for each piece of luggage in the boot (trunk); plus 50% on each of these charges between midnight and 6am. Drivers are legally required to use meters if they exist – you can try insisting that they do so, but sometimes you'll just have to negotiate the fare before you get in.

Bicycle rickshaws (trishaws) supplement the taxi service in George Town and Melaka and are definitely handy ways of getting around the older parts of town, which have convoluted and narrow streets.

In major cities there are also buses, which are extremely cheap and convenient, provided you can figure out which one is going your way. KL also has commuter trains, a Light Rail Transit (LRT) and a monorail system.

In the bigger cities across Malaysian Borneo, such as Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, you will find taxis, buses and minibuses. Once you're out of the big cities, though, you're basically on your own and must either walk or hitch. If you're really in the bush, of course, riverboats and aeroplanes are the only alternatives to lengthy jungle treks.

## Long-Distance Taxi

Long-distance taxis make Malaysian travel – already easy and convenient even by the best Asian standards – a real breeze. In almost every

town there will be a *teksi* stand where the cars are lined up and ready to go to their various destinations.

Taxis are ideal for groups of four, and are also available on a share basis. As soon as a full complement of four passengers turns up, off you go.

If you're travelling between major towns, you have a reasonable chance of finding other passengers to share without having to wait too long, but otherwise you will have to charter a whole taxi, which is four times the single-fare rate.

As Malaysia becomes increasingly wealthy, and people can afford to hire a whole taxi, the share system is becoming less reliable. Early morning is generally the best time to find people to share a taxi, but you can inquire at the taxi stand the day before as to the best time.

Taxi rates to specific destinations are fixed by the government and are posted at the taxi stands. Air-con taxis cost a few more ringgit than nonair-con, and fares are generally about twice the comparable bus fares. If you want to charter a taxi to an obscure destination, or by the hour, you'll probably have to do some negotiating. On the peninsula you're likely to pay around 50 sen per kilometre. In Sarawak, the taxi meter price (for kilometres beyond the first 3km which is RM10) is RM1.20 per km.

Taxi drivers often drive at frighteningly high speeds. They don't have as many head-on collisions as you might expect, but closing your eyes at times of high stress certainly helps! You also have the option of demanding that the driver slow down, but this can be met with varying degrees of hostility. Another tactic is to look for ageing taxis and taxi drivers – they must be doing something right to have made it this far!

## Tours

Reliable tours of both Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo are run regularly by international operators, including **Exodus** ([www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk)), **Explore** ([www.explore.co.uk](http://www.explore.co.uk)), **Peregrine Adventures** ([www.peregrineadventures.com](http://www.peregrineadventures.com)) and **Intrepid Travel** ([www.intrepidtravel.com](http://www.intrepidtravel.com)) as well as local specialist outfits. Such tours are often a good way to see the best of Malaysian Borneo in a short period of time and without having to worry about possibly problematic transport connections.

In contrast, getting around the peninsula under your own steam is rarely difficult, making a tour less necessary.

## Train

Malaysia's privatised national railway company is **Keretapi Tanah Melayu** (KTM; ☎1300 885 862; [www.ktmb.com.my](http://www.ktmb.com.my)). It runs a modern, comfortable and economical railway service, although there are basically only two lines and for the most part services are slow.

One line runs up the west coast from Singapore, through KL, Butterworth and on into Thailand. The other branches off from this line at Gemas and runs through Kuala Lipis up to the northeastern corner of the country near Kota Bharu in Kelantan. Often referred to as the 'jungle train', this line is properly known as the 'East-coast line'.

In Sabah the **North Borneo Railway** ([www.suteraharbour.com](http://www.suteraharbour.com)), a small narrow-gauge line running through the Sungai Padas gorge from Tenom to Beaufort, offers tourist trips lasting four hours on Wednesday and Saturday.

## Services & Classes

There are two main types of rail services: express and local trains. Express trains are air-conditioned and have 'premier' (1st class), 'superior' (2nd class) and sometimes 'economy' (3rd class) seats. Similarly, on overnight trains you'll find 'premier night deluxe' cabins (upper/lower berth RM50/70 extra), 'premier night standard' cabins (upper/lower berth

RM18/26 extra), and 'standard night' cabins (upper/lower berth RM12/17 extra). Local trains are usually economy-class only, but some have superior seats.

Express trains stop only at main stations, while local services, which operate mostly on the east-coast line, stop everywhere, including the middle of the jungle, to let passengers and their goods on and off. Consequently

local services take more than twice as long as the express trains and run to erratic schedules, but if you're in no hurry they provide a colourful experience and are good for short journeys.

Train schedules are reviewed biannually, so check the KTM website, where you can make bookings and buy tickets.



# Health

## BEFORE YOU GO

- » Take out health insurance.
- » Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers.
- » Carry a signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including their generic names.
- » If you have a heart condition bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.
- » Bring a double supply of any regular medication in case of loss or theft.

## Recommended Vaccinations

Proof of yellow fever vaccination will be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone (Africa or South America) within the six days prior to entering the region. Otherwise the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations:

» **Adult diphtheria and tetanus** Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years.

» **Hepatitis A** Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year. A booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection.

» **Hepatitis B** Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A.

» **Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)** Two doses of MMR are required unless you have had the diseases. Many young adults require a booster.

» **Polio** There have been no reported cases of polio in recent years. Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection.

» **Typhoid** Recommended unless your trip is less than a week and is only to developed cities. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available; however the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects.

» **Varicella** If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

## Internet Resources & Further Reading

Lonely Planet's *Asia & India: Healthy Travel* is packed with useful information. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills. Online resources include:

» **Centres for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))

» **MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com))

» **World Health Organization** ([www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith))

## IN MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE & BRUNEI

### Availability & Cost of Health Care

In Malaysia the standard of medical care in the major centres is good, and most problems can be adequately dealt with in Kuala Lumpur.

Singapore has excellent medical facilities. You cannot buy medication over the counter without a doctor's prescription in Singapore.

In Brunei, general care is reasonable. There is no local medical university, so expats and foreign-trained locals run the health-care system. Serious or complex cases are better managed in Singapore, but adequate primary health care and stabilisation are available.

## Infectious Diseases

The following are the most common for travellers:

» **Dengue Fever** Becoming increasingly common in cities. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect

## HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website, if one is available, before departure:

- » **Australia** ([www.smarttraveller.gov.au](http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au))
- » **Canada** ([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca))
- » **New Zealand** ([www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz))
- » **UK** ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk))
- » **USA** ([wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel))

avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms can include high fever, severe headache, body ache, a rash and diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – don't take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of hemorrhaging.

» **Hepatitis A** This food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. All travellers to that region should be vaccinated against it.

» **Hepatitis B** The only sexually transmitted disease (STD) that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact.

» **Hepatitis E** Transmitted through contaminated food and water and has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

» **HIV** Unprotected heterosexual sex is the main method of transmission.

» **Influenza** Can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease

or diabetes; vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

» **Malaria** Uncommon in the region and antimalarial drugs are rarely recommended for travellers. However, there may be a small risk in rural areas. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

» **Rabies** A potential risk, and invariably fatal if untreated, rabies is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. Pretravel vaccination means the post-bite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine based antiseptic. If you are not prevaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible.

» **Typhoid** This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. Symptoms include high and slowly progressive fever, headache, a dry cough and stomach pain. Vaccination, recom-

mended for all travellers spending more than a week in Malaysia, is not 100% effective so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

## Traveller's Diarrhoea

By far the most common problem affecting travellers and commonly caused by a bacteria. Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; use a solution such as Gastrolyte. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper', but it can be helpful in certain situations, eg if you have to go on a long bus ride. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

**Giardiasis** is relatively common. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second option.

## DRINKING WATER

» Never drink tap water unless you've verified that it's safe (many parts of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei have modern treatment plants).

» Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase.

» Avoid ice in places that look dubious.

» Avoid fruit juices if they have not been freshly squeezed or you suspect they may have been watered down.

» Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it.

» The best chemical purifier is iodine. It should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems.

» Water filters should also filter out viruses. Ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, ie less than 4 microns.

## LEECHES

You may not encounter any of these slimy little vampires while walking through the region's jungle, but if the trail is leafy and it's been raining, chances are you'll be preyed upon.

The local leeches are so small they can squeeze through tight-knit socks. They don't stay tiny for long, however, since once a leech has attached to your skin, it won't let go until it has sucked as much blood as it can hold.

Two species are common: the brown leech and the tiger leech. The tiger leech is recognisable by its cream and black stripes, but you'll probably feel one before you see it. Unlike the brown leech, whose suction is painless, tiger leeches sting a bit. Brown leeches hang around on, or near, the forest floor, waiting to grab onto passing boots or pants. Tiger leeches lurk on the leaves of small trees and tend to attack between the waist and neck, and that can mean any orifice there and around. Keep your shirt tucked in.

Leeches are harmless, but bites can become infected. Prevention is better than the cure and opinion varies on what works best. Insect repellent on feet, shoes and socks works temporarily; loose tobacco in your shoes and socks also helps – Kelabit hunters swear by it. Better yet, invest in some leech-proof socks, which are a kind of tropical gaiter that covers the foot and boot heel and fastens below the knees.

Safe and effective ways to dislodge leeches include flicking them off sideways (pulling a leech off by the tail might make it dig in harder) or sprinkling salt on them. Tiger balm, iodine or medicated menthol oil will also get leeches off. High-pitched screaming doesn't seem to affect them much. Succumb to your fate as a reluctant blood donor and they will eventually drop off.

## Environmental Hazards

### Air Pollution

If you have severe respiratory problems, speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. If troubled by the pollution, leave the city for a few days to get some fresh air.

### Diving & Surfing

If planning on diving or surfing, seek specialised advice before you travel to ensure your medical kit also contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections. Have a dive medical before you leave your home country – there are certain medical conditions that are incompatible with diving, and economic considerations may override health considerations at some dive operations in Asia.

### Heat

It can take up to two weeks to adapt to the region's hot climate. Swelling of the feet

and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include feeling weak; headache; irritability; nausea or vomiting; sweaty skin; a fast, weak pulse; and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treat by getting out of the heat; applying cool, wet cloths to the skin; laying flat with legs raised; and rehydrating with water containing a quarter of a teaspoon of salt per litre.

Heat stroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness; nausea; a hot, dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C; dizziness; confusion; loss of coordination; fits; and, eventually, collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting out of the heat, removing clothes, and applying cool, wet cloths or ice to

the body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat – an itchy rash of tiny lumps – is caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. Treat by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided.

### Insect Bites & Stings

» **Lice** Most commonly inhabit your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. Treat with numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as Permethrin.

» **Ticks** Contracted after walking in rural areas. If you are bitten and experience symptoms – such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever, or muscle aches – see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

» **Leeches** Found in humid rainforest areas. Don't transmit any disease but their bites can be itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily

become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

» **Bees or wasps** If allergic to their stings, carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment.

» **Jellyfish** Most are not dangerous. If stung, pour vinegar onto the affected area to neutralise the poison. Take painkillers, and seek medical advice if your condition worsens.

## Skin Problems

There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers in humid countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. The first occurs in moist areas that get less air, such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an anti-fungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. Tinea versicolour is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness), see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts as they become easily infected.

## Snakes

Southeast Asia is home to many species of poisonous and harmless snakes. Assume all snakes are poisonous and never try to catch one. Always wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes.

First aid in the event of a snake bite involves pressure immobilisation via an elastic bandage firmly wrapped around the affected limb, starting at the bite site and working up towards the chest. The bandage should not be so tight that the circulation is cut off; the fingers or toes should be kept free so the circulation can be checked. Immobilise the limb with a splint and carry the victim to medical attention. Don't use tourniquets or try to suck out the venom. Antivenin is available for most species.

## Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day, sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least SPF 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). If

you're sunburnt, stay out of the sun until you've recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. Applied twice daily, 1% hydrocortisone cream is also helpful.

## Travelling with Children

There are specific issues you should consider before travelling with your child:

» All routine vaccinations should be up to date, as many of the common childhood diseases that have been eliminated in the West are still present in parts of Southeast Asia. A travel-health clinic can advise on specific vaccines, but think seriously about rabies vaccination if you're visiting rural areas or travelling for more than a month, as children are more vulnerable to severe animal bites.

## DON'T LET THE BEDBUGS BITE

Bedbugs live in the cracks of furniture and walls and migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. They are a particular problem in the region and are more likely to strike in high-turnover accommodation, especially backpacker hostels, though they can be found anywhere. The room may look very clean but they can still be there. Protect yourself with the following strategies:

- » Ask the hotel or hostel what they do to avoid bed bugs. It's a common problem and reputable establishments should have a pest-control procedure in place.
- » Keep your luggage elevated off the floor to avoid having the critters latch on – this is one of the common ways bedbugs are spread from place to place.
- » Check the room carefully for signs of bugs – you may find their translucent light brown skins or poppy seed-like excrement. Pay particular attention to places less likely to have seen a dusting from cleaning staff. If you do get bitten:
- » Treat the itch with antihistamine.
- » Thoroughly clean your luggage and launder all your clothes, sealing them after in plastic bags to further protect them.
- » Be sure to tell the management – if they seem unconcerned or refuse to do anything about it complain to the local tourist office and write to us.

» Children are more prone to getting serious forms of mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria, Japanese B encephalitis and dengue fever. In particular, malaria is very serious in children and can rapidly lead to death – you should think seriously before taking your child into a malaria-risk area. Permethrin-impregnated clothing is safe to use, and insect repellents should contain between 10% and 20% DEET.

» Diarrhoea can cause rapid dehydration and you should pay particular attention to keeping your child well hydrated. The best antibiotic for children with diarrhoea is Azithromycin.

» Children can get very sick very quickly so locate good medical facilities at your destination and make contact if you are worried – it's always better to get a medical opinion than to try to treat your own children.

## Women's Health

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there's a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with

a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid travel in rural areas with poor transport and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

» Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. The World Health Organization recommends that pregnant women do not travel to areas with malaria resistant to chloroquine. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs is completely safe in pregnancy.

» Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

» In urban areas, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary-tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

## Traditional & Folk Medicine

Throughout Asia, traditional medical systems are widely practised. There is a big difference between these traditional healing systems and 'folk' medicine. Folk remedies should be avoided, as they often involve rather dubious procedures with potential complications. In comparison, traditional healing systems, such as traditional Chinese medicine, are well respected, and aspects of them are being increasingly utilised by Western medical practitioners.

All traditional Asian medical systems identify a vital life force, and see blockage or imbalance as causing disease. Techniques such as herbal medicines, massage and acupuncture bring this vital force back into balance or maintain balance. These therapies are best used for treating chronic disease such as chronic fatigue, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and some chronic skin conditions. Traditional medicines should be avoided for treating serious acute infections such as malaria.

Be aware that 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe', and there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If you are using both systems, ensure you inform both practitioners as to what the other has prescribed.

# Language

The national language of Malaysia is Malay, also known as Bahasa Malaysia. It's spoken with slight variations throughout Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, although it's by no means the only language. Various dialects of Chinese are spoken by those of Chinese ancestry, and Mandarin is fairly widely used. Indian Malaysians also speak Tamil, Malayalam and other languages. In Singapore, the official languages alongside Malay (which is mostly restricted to the Malay community) are Tamil, Mandarin and English.

You'll find it easy to get by with English not only in Singapore and on mainland Malaysia, but also in Malaysian Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak) and Brunei. English is the most common second language for Borneo's ethnic groups and is often used by people of different backgrounds, like ethnic Chinese and ethnic Malays, to communicate with one another.

In Bahasa Malaysia, most letters are pronounced more or less the same as their English counterparts, except for the letter c which is always pronounced as the 'ch' in 'chair'. Nearly all syllables carry equal emphasis, but a good approximation is to lightly stress the second-last syllable.

Pronouns, particularly 'you', are rarely used in Bahasa Malaysia. *Kamu* is the egalitarian form designed to overcome the plethora of terms relating to a person's age and gender that are used for the second person.

## BASICS

**Hello.**

*Helo.*

**Goodbye.**

*Selamat tinggal/jalan.*  
(said by person leaving/  
staying)

## WANT MORE?

For in-depth language information and handy phrases, check out Lonely Planet's [Malay Phrasebook](#).

You'll find it at **shop**

**.lonelyplanet.com**, or you can buy Lonely Planet's iPhone phrasebooks at the Apple App Store.

**How are you?**

*Apa kabar?*

**I'm fine.**

*Kabar baik.*

**Excuse me.**

*Maaf.*

**Sorry.**

*Maaf.*

**Yes./No.**

*Ya./Tidak.*

**Please.**

*Silakan.*

**Thank you.**

*Terima kasih.*

**You're welcome.**

*Sama-sama.*

**What's your name?**

*Siapa nama kamu?*

**My name is ...**

*Nama saya ...*

**Do you speak English?**

*Adakah anda berbahasa  
Inggeris?*

**I don't understand.**

*Saya tidak faham.*

## ACCOMMODATION

**Do you have any  
rooms available?**

*Ada bilik kosong?*

**How much is it per  
day/person?**

*Berapa harga satu  
malam/orang?*

**Is breakfast included?**

*Makan pagi termasukkah?*

## Question Words

**How?**

*Berapa?*

**What?**

*Apa?*

**When?**

*Bilakah?*

**Where?**

*Di mana?*

**Who?**

*Siapakah?*

**Why?**

*Mengapa?*

## KEY PATTERNS

To get by in Malay, mix and match these simple patterns with words of your choice:

### When's (the next bus)?

*Jam berapa (bis yang berikutnya)?*

### Where's (the station)?

*Di mana (stasiun)?*

### I'm looking for (a hotel).

*Saya cari (hotel).*

### Do you have (a local map)?

*Ada (peta daerah)?*

### Is there a (lift)?

*Ada (lift)?*

### Can I (enter)?

*Boleh saya (masuk)?*

### Do I need (a visa)?

*Saya harus pakai (visa)?*

### I'd like (the menu).

*Saya minta (daftar makanan).*

### I'd like (to hire a car).

*Saya mau (sewa mobil).*

### Could you (help me)?

*Bisa Anda (bantu) saya?*

campsite	tempat perkhemahan
guesthouse	rumah tetamu
hotel	hotel
youth hostel	asrama belia
single room	bilik untuk seorang
room with a double bed	bilik untuk dua orang
room with two beds	bilik yang ada dua katil
air-con	pendingin udara
bathroom	bilik air
mosquito coil	obat nyamuk
window	tingkap

## DIRECTIONS

Where is ...?	Di mana ...?
What's the address?	Apa alamatnya?
Could you write it down, please?	Tolong tuliskan alamat itu?
Can you show me (on the map)?	Tolong tunjukkan (di peta)?
Turn left/right.	Belok kiri/kanan.
Go straight ahead.	Jalan terus.

at the corner  
at the traffic lights  
behind  
far (from)  
in front of  
near (to)  
opposite

di simpang  
di tempat lampu isyarat  
di belakang  
jauh (dari)  
di depan  
dekat (dengan)  
berhadapan dengan

## EATING & DRINKING

A table for (two), please.

Meja untuk (dua) orang.

What's in that dish?

Ada apa dalam masakan itu?

Bring the bill, please.

Tolong bawa bil.

I don't eat ...

Saya tak suka makan ...

chicken

ayam

fish

ikan

(red) meat

daging (merah)

nuts

kacang

## Key Words

bottle	botol
breakfast	sarapan pagi
cold	sejuk
cup	cawan
dinner	makan malam
food	makanan
fork	garfu
glass	gelas
hot	panas
knife	pisau
lunch	makan tengahari
market	pasar
menu	menu
plate	pinggan
restaurant	restoran
spicy	pedas
spoon	sedu
vegetarian	sayuran saja
with	dengan
without	tanpa

## Meat & Fish

beef	daging lembu
chicken	ayam
crab	ketam

fish	<i>ikan</i>
lamb	<i>anak biri-biri</i>
mussels	<i>kepah</i>
pork	<i>babi</i>
shrimp	<i>udang</i>

## Fruit & Vegetables

apple	<i>epal</i>
banana	<i>pisang</i>
carrot	<i>lobak</i>
cucumber	<i>timun</i>
jackfruit	<i>nangka</i>
mango	<i>mangga</i>
orange	<i>jeruk oren</i>
peanut	<i>kacang</i>
starfruit	<i>belimbing</i>
tomato	<i>tomato</i>
watermelon	<i>tembikai</i>

## Other

bread	<i>roti</i>
cheese	<i>keju</i>
egg	<i>telur</i>
ice	<i>ais</i>
rice	<i>nasi</i>
salt	<i>garam</i>
sugar	<i>gula</i>

## Drinks

beer	<i>bir</i>
bottled water	<i>air botol</i>
citrus juice	<i>air limau</i>
coffee	<i>kopi</i>
milk	<i>susu</i>
tea	<i>teh</i>
water	<i>air</i>
wine	<i>wain</i>

## EMERGENCIES

Help!	<i>Tolong!</i>
Stop!	<i>Berhenti!</i>
I'm lost.	<i>Saya sesat.</i>
Go away!	<i>Pergi!</i>
There's been an accident.	<i>Ada kemalangan.</i>

Call the doctor!	<i>Panggil doktor!</i>
Call the police!	<i>Panggil polis!</i>
I'm ill.	<i>Saya sakit.</i>
It hurts here.	<i>Sini sakit.</i>
I'm allergic to (nuts).	<i>Saya alergic kepada (kacang).</i>

## SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'd like to buy ...	<i>Saya nak beli ...</i>
I'm just looking.	<i>Saya nak tengok saja.</i>
Can I look at it?	<i>Boleh saya tengok barang itu?</i>
How much is it?	<i>Berapa harganya?</i>
It's too expensive.	<i>Mahalnya.</i>
Can you lower the price?	<i>Boleh kurang?</i>
There's a mistake in the bill.	<i>Bil ini salah.</i>

ATM	<i>ATM ('a-te-em')</i>
credit card	<i>kad kredit</i>
internet cafe	<i>cyber cafe</i>
post office	<i>pejabat pos</i>
public phone	<i>telpon awam</i>
tourist office	<i>pejabat pelancong</i>

## TIME & DATES

What time is it?	<i>Pukul berapa?</i>
It's (seven) o'clock.	<i>Pukul (tujuh).</i>
It's half past (one).	<i>Pukul (satu) setengah.</i>

in the morning	<i>pagi</i>
in the afternoon	<i>tengahari</i>
in the evening	<i>petang</i>

yesterday	<i>semalam</i>
today	<i>hari ini</i>
tomorrow	<i>esok</i>

### Signs

Buka	Open
Dilarang	Prohibited
Keluar	Exit
Lelaki	Men
Masuk	Entrance
Perempuan	Women
Tandas	Toilets
Tutup	Closed



<b>Monday</b>	<i>hari Isnin</i>
<b>Tuesday</b>	<i>hari Selasa</i>
<b>Wednesday</b>	<i>hari Rabu</i>
<b>Thursday</b>	<i>hari Kamis</i>
<b>Friday</b>	<i>hari Jumaat</i>
<b>Saturday</b>	<i>hari Sabtu</i>
<b>Sunday</b>	<i>hari Minggu</i>

<b>January</b>	<i>Januari</i>
<b>February</b>	<i>Februari</i>
<b>March</b>	<i>Mac</i>
<b>April</b>	<i>April</i>
<b>May</b>	<i>Mei</i>
<b>June</b>	<i>Jun</i>
<b>July</b>	<i>Julai</i>
<b>August</b>	<i>Ogos</i>
<b>September</b>	<i>September</i>
<b>October</b>	<i>Oktober</i>
<b>November</b>	<i>November</i>
<b>December</b>	<i>Disember</i>

### Numbers

<b>1</b>	<i>satu</i>
<b>2</b>	<i>dua</i>
<b>3</b>	<i>tiga</i>
<b>4</b>	<i>empat</i>
<b>5</b>	<i>lima</i>
<b>6</b>	<i>enam</i>
<b>7</b>	<i>tujuh</i>
<b>8</b>	<i>lapan</i>
<b>9</b>	<i>sembilan</i>
<b>10</b>	<i>sepuluh</i>
<b>11</b>	<i>sebelas</i>
<b>12</b>	<i>dua belas</i>
<b>20</b>	<i>dua puluh</i>
<b>21</b>	<i>dua puluh satu</i>
<b>22</b>	<i>dua puluh dua</i>
<b>30</b>	<i>tiga puluh</i>
<b>40</b>	<i>empat puluh</i>
<b>50</b>	<i>lima puluh</i>
<b>60</b>	<i>enam puluh</i>
<b>70</b>	<i>tujuh puluh</i>
<b>80</b>	<i>lapan puluh</i>
<b>90</b>	<i>sembilan puluh</i>
<b>100</b>	<i>seratus</i>
<b>200</b>	<i>dua ratus</i>
<b>1000</b>	<i>seribu</i>
<b>2000</b>	<i>dua ribu</i>

## TRANSPORT

<b>At what time does the ... leave?</b>	<i>Pukul berapa ... berangkat?</i>
<b>boat</b>	<i>kapal</i>
<b>bus</b>	<i>bas</i>
<b>plane</b>	<i>kapal terbang</i>
<b>train</b>	<i>kereta api</i>
<b>I want to go to ...</b>	<i>Saya nak ke ...</i>
<b>Does it stop at ... ?</b>	<i>Berhenti di ...?</i>
<b>How long will it be delayed?</b>	<i>Berapa lamatnya?</i>
<b>I'd like to get off at ...</b>	<i>Saya nak turun di ...</i>
<b>Please put the meter on.</b>	<i>Tolong pakai meter.</i>
<b>Please stop here.</b>	<i>Tolong berhenti di sini.</i>
<b>I'd like a ... ticket.</b>	<i>Saya nak tiket ...</i>
<b>1st-class</b>	<i>kelas pertama</i>
<b>2nd-class</b>	<i>kelas kedua</i>
<b>one-way</b>	<i>sehalu</i>
<b>return</b>	<i>pergi balik</i>
<b>the first</b>	<i>pertama</i>
<b>the last</b>	<i>terakhir</i>
<b>the next</b>	<i>berikutnya</i>
<b>bus station</b>	<i>stesen bas</i>
<b>bus stop</b>	<i>perhentian bas</i>
<b>cancelled</b>	<i>dibatalkan</i>
<b>delayed</b>	<i>lambat</i>
<b>platform</b>	<i>landasan</i>
<b>ticket office</b>	<i>pejabat tiket</i>
<b>ticket window</b>	<i>tempat/kaunter tiket</i>
<b>timetable</b>	<i>jadual waktu</i>
<b>train station</b>	<i>stesen keretapi</i>
<b>I'd like to hire a ...</b>	<i>Saya nak menyewa ...</i>
<b>bicycle</b>	<i>basikal</i>
<b>car</b>	<i>kereta</i>
<b>jeep</b>	<i>jip</i>
<b>motorbike</b>	<i>motosikal</i>
<b>diesel</b>	<i>diesel</i>
<b>helmet</b>	<i>topi keledar</i>
<b>leadet petrol</b>	<i>petrol plumbum</i>
<b>unleaded petrol</b>	<i>tanpa plumbum</i>
<b>petrol</b>	<i>petrol</i>
<b>pam</b>	<i>pam</i>

## SINGLISH

One of the most intriguing things the visitor to Singapore will notice is the strange patois spoken by the locals. Nominally English, it contains borrowed words from Hokkien and Malay, such as *shioh* (delicious) and *kasar* (rough). Unnecessary prepositions and pronouns are dropped, word order is flipped, phrases are clipped short, and stress and intonation are unconventional, to say the least. The result is known locally as Singlish. Singlish is frowned upon in official use, though you'll get a good idea of its pervasive characteristics of pronunciation if you listen to the news bulletins on TV or the radio.

There are a number of interesting characteristics that differentiate Singlish from standard English. First off, there's the reverse stress pattern of double-barrelled words. For example, in standard English the stress would be '*fire*-fighter' or '*theatre* company' but in Singlish it's '*fire*-fighter' and '*theatre* company'. Word-final consonants – particularly *l* or *k* – are often dropped, and vowels are often distorted; a Chinese-speaking taxi driver might not understand 'Perak Road' since they pronounce it 'Pera Roh'. The particle *-lah* is often tagged on to the end of sentences as in, 'No good, *lah*', which could mean (among other things) 'I don't think that's such a good idea'. Requests or questions will often be marked with a tag ending, since direct questioning is considered rude. So a question such as 'Would you like a beer?' might be rendered as 'You want beer or not?', which, ironically, might come across to speakers of standard English as being rude. Verb tenses tend to be nonexistent – future, present or past actions are all indicated by time phrases, so in Singlish it's 'I go tomorrow' or 'I go yesterday'.

The following are some frequently heard Singlishisms:

**ah beng** – unsophisticated person with no fashion sense or style; redneck

**Aiyah!** – 'Oh, dear!'

**Alamak!** – exclamation of disbelief, frustration or dismay, like 'Oh my God!'

**ayam** – Malay word for chicken; adjective for something inferior or weak

**blur** – a slow or uninformed person

**buaya** – womaniser, from the Malay for 'crocodile'

**Can?** – 'Is that OK?'

**Can!** – 'Yes! That's fine.'

**char bor** – babe, woman

**cheena** – old-fashioned Chinese in dress or thinking (derogatory)

**go stan** – to reverse, as in 'Go stan the car' (from the naval expression 'go astern'; pronounced 'go stun')

**heng** – luck, good fortune (from Hokkien)

**hiao** – vain

**inggrish** – English

**kambing** – foolish person, literally 'goat' (from Malay)

**kena ketuk** – ripped off, literally 'get knocked'

**kiasee** – scared, literally 'afraid to die'; a coward

**kiasu** – selfish, pushy, always on the lookout for a bargain, literally 'afraid to lose'

**lah** – generally an ending for any phrase or sentence; can translate as 'OK', but has no real meaning; added for emphasis to just about everything

**looksee** – take a look

**malu** – embarrassed

**minah** – girlfriend

**Or not?** – general tag for questions, as in 'Can or not?' (Can you or can't you?)

**see first** – wait and see what happens

**shack** – tired

**shioh** – good, great, delicious

**steady lah** – well done, excellent; expression of praise

**Wah!** – general exclamation of surprise or distress

**ya ya** – boastful, as in 'He always *ya ya*'

**Is this the road to ...?** *Ini jalan ke ...?*

**Where's a petrol station?** *Stesen minyak di mana?*

**(How long) Can I park here?** *(Beberapa lama) Boleh saya letak kereta di sini?*

**I need a mechanic.** *Kami memerlukan mekanik.*

**The car has broken down at ...**

**I have a flat tyre.**

**I've run out of petrol.**

**I've had an accident.**

*Kereta saya telah rosak di ...*

*Tayarnya kempis.*

*Minyak sudah habis.*

*Saya terlibat dalam kemalangan.*

## GLOSSARY

**adat** – Malay customary law

**adat temenggong** – Malay law with Indian modifications, governing the customs and ceremonies of the sultans

**air** – water

**air terjun** – waterfall

**alor** – groove; furrow; main channel of a river

**ampang** – dam

**ang pow** – red packets of money used as offerings, payment or gifts

**APEC** – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

**arak** – Malay local alcohol

**arrack** – see arak

**Asean** – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

**atap** – roof thatching

**Baba-Nonya** – descendants of Chinese immigrants to the Straits Settlements (namely Melaka, Singapore and Penang) who intermarried with Malays and adopted many Malay customs; also known as Peranakan, or Straits Chinese; sometimes spelt Nyonya

**Bahasa Malaysia** – Malay language; also known as Bahasa Melayu

**bandar** – seaport; town

**Bangsawan** – Malay opera

**batang** – stem; tree trunk; the main branch of a river

**batik** – technique of imprinting cloth with dye to produce multicoloured patterns

**batu** – stone; rock; milestone

**belukar** – secondary forest

**bendahara** – chief minister

**bendang** – irrigated land

**bomoh** – spiritual healer

**British Resident** – chief British representative during the colonial era

**bukit** – hill

**bumboat** – motorised sampan

**bumiputra** – literally, sons of the soil; indigenous Malays

**bunga raya** – hibiscus flower (national flower of Malaysia)

**dadah** – drugs

**dato', datuk** – literally, grandfather; general male nonroyal title of distinction

**dipterocarp** – family of trees, native to Malaysia, that have two-winged fruits

**dusun** – small town; orchard; fruit grove

**genting** – mountain pass

**godown** – river warehouse

**gua** – cave

**gunung** – mountain

**hilir** – lower reaches of a river

**hutan** – jungle; forest

**imam** – keeper of Islamic knowledge and leader of prayer

**istana** – palace

**jalan** – road

**kain songket** – traditional Malay handwoven fabric with gold threads

**kampung** – village; also spelt kampong

**kangkar** – Chinese village

**karst** – characteristic scenery of a limestone region, including features such as underground streams and caverns

**kedai kopi** – coffee shop

**kerangas** – distinctive vegetation zone of Borneo, usually found on sandstone, containing pitcher plants and other unusual flora

**khalwat** – literally, close proximity; exhibition of

public affection between the sexes, which is prohibited for unmarried Muslim couples

**kongsi** – Chinese clan organisations, also known as ritual brotherhoods, heaven-man-earth societies, triads or secret societies; meeting house for Chinese of the same clan

**kopitiam** – coffee shop

**kota** – fort; city

**kramat** – Malay shrine

**KTM** – Keretapi Tanah Melayu; Malaysian Railways System

**kuala** – river mouth; place where a tributary joins a larger river

**laksamana** – admiral

**langur** – small, usually tree-dwelling monkey

**laut** – sea

**lebuhraya** – street

**Lebuhraya** – expressway or freeway; usually refers to the North–South Highway, which runs from Johor Bahru to Bukit Kayu Hitam at the Thai border

**lorong** – narrow street; alley

**LRT** – Light Rail Transit (Kuala Lumpur)

**lubuk** – deep pool

**macaque** – any of several small species of monkey

**mandi** – bathe; Southeast Asian wash basin

**masjid** – mosque

**MCP** – Malayan Communist Party

**Melayu Islam Beraja** – MIB; Brunei's national ideology

**merdeka** – independence

**Merlion** – half-lion, half-fish animal; symbol of Singapore

**MRT** – Mass Rapid Transit (Singapore)

**muara** – river mouth  
**muezzin** – mosque official who calls the faithful to prayer

**negara** – country

**negeri** – state

**nonya** – see Baba-Nonya

**orang asing** – foreigner

**Orang Asli** – literally, Original People; Malaysian aborigines

**Orang Laut** – literally, Coastal People; Sea Gypsies

**Orang Ulu** – literally, Up-river People

**padang** – grassy area; field; also the city square

**pantai** – beach

**PAP** – People's Action Party

**parang** – long jungle knife

**PAS** – Parti Islam se-Malaysia

**pasar** – market

**pasar malam** – night market

**Pejabat Residen** – Resident's Office

**pekan** – market place; town

**pelabuhan** – port

**pencak silat** – martial-arts dance form

**penghulu** – chief or village head

**pengkalan** – quay

**Peranakan** – literally, half-caste; refers to the Baba-Nonya or Straits Chinese

**PIE** – Pan-Island Expressway, one of Singapore's main road arteries

**pua kumbu** – traditional finely woven cloth

**pulau** – island

**puteri** – princess

**raja** – prince; ruler

**rakyat** – common people

**rantau** – straight coastline

**rattan** – stems from climbing palms used for wicker-work and canes

**rimba** – jungle

**rotan** – cane used to punish miscreants

**roti** – bread

**sampan** – small boat

**samsu** – Malay alcohol

**sarong** – all-purpose cloth, often sewn into a tube, and worn by women, men and children

**seberang** – opposite side of road; far bank of a river

**selat** – strait

**semenanjung** – peninsula

**silat** – see pencak silat

**simpang** – crossing; junction

**songkok** – traditional Malay headdress worn by males

**Straits Chinese** – see Baba-Nonya

**sungai** – river

**syariah** – Islamic system of law

**tambang** – river ferry; fare

**tamu** – weekly market

**tanah** – land

**tanjung** – headland

**tasik** – lake

**teluk** – bay; sometimes spelt telok

**temenggong** – Malay administrator

**towkang** – Chinese junk

**tuai rumah** – longhouse chief (Sarawak)

**tuak** – local 'firewater' alcohol (Malaysian Borneo)

**tunku** – prince

**ujung** – cape

**UMNO** – United Malays National Organisation

**warung** – small eating stalls

**wayang** – Chinese opera

**wayang kulit** – shadow-puppet theatre

**wisma** – office block or shopping centre

**yang di-pertuan agong** – Malaysia's head of state, or 'king'

**yang di-pertuan besar** – head of state in Negeri Sembilan

**yang di-pertuan muda** – under-king

**yang di-pertuan negeri** – governor

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